LEADING DURING CHANGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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August 2018

Major Subject: Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications

ABSTRACT

This study purpose was to describe the lived experience of individuals' experiences with the phenomena of leading during change. An epistemological constructivist view using a phenomenological approach was used to answer the research question of "How do mid-level leaders in higher education describe their experiences during organizational change?"

Qualitative methods were used in data collection which included open-ended semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 17 participants to gain insight into their lived experience over an 11 month period. The interview aided me the researcher in the understanding, and exploration of the underlying structures and context of the phenomenon of leading during change. Participant interviews were transcribed, and data were coded and parsed using qualitative coding approaches. Data analysis was conducted using phenological framework. Four themes emerged following this transcendental analytical process, to provide the reader an understanding of the experiences of mid-level leaders during change. I used the four themes as well as individual vignettes to provide the reader an understanding of the experiences of leaders and their followers, leading organizational change. Analysis of the participants' surfaced four themes included, perceptions of responsibility and authority, shared leadership during organizational change, the duality of the mid-level leader role, and ambiguity of leadership during organizational change. As part of the data analysis and data collection I use various technics to ensure trustworthiness, credibility and reliability. These included prolonged engagement, member checks, debriefing, and collection of data from multiple sources.

The findings suggest that mid-level leaders deal with leadership self-identity and leadership self-efficacy while trying to lead their organization and followers through change. Future research could include review of what factors influence a leader to examine their leadership identities. Additional research could also examine if a different follower typologies provides additional insights into how a leader, leading organizational change modifies leader-follower relationships.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my wife Lindsey and my children, in whom I find eternal hope and inspiration. I thank my wife for her immense patience, love, and support, and for the wonderful job she has done in raising our children Addilee, Alexi, and Alexander as I pursued my doctoral degree. Or, as she put it, “While I hid in my home office for hours, weeks, and months, theorizing as a way to get out of housework!”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my committee chair, Dr. Strong, and my committee members, Dr. Briers, Dr. Dooley, and Dr. Kenimer, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research.

Thanks also go to my friends and colleagues and the department faculty and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a great experience.

I’m grateful to my parents for their encouragement and insistence that the greatest thing you can pursue in life is knowledge and lifelong learning that can lead to wisdom. A special thanks to my father, whose proudest accomplishment is his children being educated, and who constantly reminded me, “¡Tu enico trabajo es la escuela y estudios!” (“Your only job is school and your studies!”)

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Jennifer Strong, Associate Professor and Graduate Advisor; Dr. Kim Dooley, Professor; Dr. Gary Briers, Professor of the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communications; and Dr. Ann Kenimer, Professor of the Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering. All work for the dissertation was completed independently by the student.

Funding Sources

There are no outside funding contributions to acknowledge related to the research and compilation of this document.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Change is expected, required, and critical to remaining relevant and is a common refrain in leadership, organizational behavior, and management literature. Over the last 20 years, there has been a growing expectation that employees and leaders should be able to adapt easily to rapidly changing environments (Lane, 2007). This proliferation of organizational change ranges from modifications in day-to-day operations, to the evolution of organizations, to revolutionary change in all types of industries and organizations. Organizational change is messy, complex, fluid, open-ended, and disruptive to the organization, its members, and its leaders (Jian, 2011). Leaders, then, must be able to lead followers and the organization through these dynamic organizational transitions. Specifically, Bryman (1992) suggested the ability to lead continual organizational change is now viewed as a requirement for leaders in all levels and types of organizations.

Higher education institutions are not immune to organizational change. They are increasingly being urged by their boards/trustees and external stakeholders to shift their traditional practices from maintenance of quality faculty, teaching, and academic operations toward more practices that put an emphasis on satisfying current demand, anticipating future demand, continuously improving, and keeping clients happy while reducing costs (Gumport, 2000). These new business-focused practices create frequent organizational change as higher education entities try to align both operationally and strategically to changing internal and external environments (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011). Newman, Coutourier, and Surry (2004) contended that a shift toward viewing higher education institutions as public corporations has the potential to cause universities to go through an even more radical change in the future.

The cause for worry in regards to organizational change in universities is genuine and reflects real shifts in the environment within which universities have prospered (Lombardi, 2013). Lombardi (2013) pointed out that American higher education institutions have long been considered stable organizations that have been able to adapt slowly to ever-changing environments. Birnbaum (1992) disagreed, suggesting higher education institutions/universities are designed to resist change based on tried and true political mechanisms and procedures designed to keep change from happening. If Birnbaum's assertion is true, then this context of organizational change creates a tension (Senge, 2006) for mid-level leaders who are required to lead and implement organizational changes. This begets the question asked by Gumport (2000): "How are leaders in higher education dealing with the pace and tempo of organizational change which seems like an endless process of restructuring and resource reallocation?" (p. 88).

Leadership in universities is a complex concept. As has been noted by higher education theorists, universities change more slowly and often react negatively to change (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997). The uniqueness of a university's structure within the academic core, the administrative units, and varying leaders at all levels is required to organize, direct, persuade, and drive institutional life (Lombardi, 2013). It is within this context that I examined how leaders in higher education are leading organizational change. As universities begin to transform to become more competitive and responsive to market forces, it becomes important to understand how leadership and organization development theory interact within this context. The options primarily used to address these current challenges include development of systems of shared services, shared campuses, organizational affiliations, public-private partnerships, mergers, and acquisitions (Martin & Samels, 2017; Thomas & Chabotar, 2015).

Leadership of organizational change is not confined to the top of organizations (Caldwell, 2003; Lines, 2004). In many organizations, middle managers have increased responsibility to manage their departments, units, work teams, and subordinates. Furst (2009) concluded that “middle-managers play a critical role in organizational change; they serve as a conduit between the organizational change efforts and the very people who are required to implement the operational changes” (p. 100). Caldwell’s (2003) study on organization change agents described change managers as those individuals in mid-level leadership roles who carry forward and build support for change within business units and key functions. It is within the context of higher education institutions going through a transformational change, in this case a vertical merger, that this study examined the phenomena of leading during organizational change. The researcher examined how leaders and their followers are affected by an organizational change, specifically a merger of two higher education institutions. These organizations were selected due to the unique and transformative change that occurred via a vertical merger of two institutions: University A and University B.

Problem Statement

A vast majority of leadership and organizational change research has focused on leading change in private organizations—thereby signifying a gap in the research on the leadership of public organizations, specifically higher education (Gray, Stensaker, & Jansen, 2012; Robertson & Seneviratne, 1995; Van der Voet, 2014). Traditionally, scholars of leading organizational change focus on leadership activities and behaviors of higher-level leaders during organizational change (Ford & Ford, 2012). Thus, there has also been a lack of research on the interactions during organizational change between leaders and their followers.

Various researchers have asked for further studies to understand how leading organizational change affects leaders themselves (Burke, 2014; Ford & Ford, 2012). This study addresses these gaps by taking a holistic approach in investigating how leaders lead their followers and in exploring how their relationships are affected by an organizational change of two higher education institutions (universities) that have undergone a vertical merger into a new combined whole institution. This study fills a gap in research on leadership and organizational change by focusing on the interactions of mid-level leaders and their followers during organizational changes in a higher education setting.

Significance

This study is significant because there is a growing need to understand how organizational change affects leaders (Burke, 2014; Ford & Ford, 2012). In this study, I sought to understand how and in what manner leaders and followers experience organizational change.

Although researchers have suggested leaders do not make it through the organizational change process unscathed (Ford & Ford, 2012), there is limited knowledge of how leaders experience organizational change and how organizational change affects the leaders themselves (Burke, 2014). In studying universities and hospitals, Denis, Lamothe, and Langely (2001) described leadership as being dynamic, collective, situated, and dialectic. Leading these types of organizations, and particularly leading organizational change, places both individual leaders and the leadership constellation under stress. However, very little was known about how leaders, either individually or collectively, dealt with this in practice. Denis et al.'s study provided insights into how the leadership of organizational change in universities and hospitals manifests and into how organizational change is complicated even further by the complexity of pluralistic organizations and shared leadership. However, it provided no insight into how a leader dealt with the strategic, political, and organizational relationship. It did not discuss the stress on leaders or followers during these changes, lacked information to understand why and how this process evolved during change, and did not give insights into leaders' thoughts on the process.

Second, this study contributes to the research on leader-follower relationship dynamics within the context of organizational change by illuminating how organizational change modifies leaders, subordinates, and their relationships. In particular, the results of this study provide other leaders with the ability to learn from the lived experience of both leaders and followers who have participated in organizational change. It increases the understanding of leadership by examining leadership from multiple perspectives as a social and cultural phenomenon (Day, 2014). A multi-perspective approach is significant in adding to the research literature because the approach provides understanding of leadership from the perspective of the leader, the follower, and the context (Day, 2014).

One of the goals of this study was to provide insight into how organizational change affects leaders (Burke, 2014), therefore providing a richer and deeper understanding of the roles and experiences of leaders and followers during an organizational change in a higher education setting. In turn, this study will aid other leadership researchers in understanding how organizational change in higher education institutions affects leaders, followers, and their relationships.

Finally, this study elucidates what it means to be a mid-level leader of organizational change within the context of higher education, thus allowing other higher education administrators to learn and understand the organizational change from the lived experiences of those in this study.

Research Objectives

Leadership during organizational change is one of the most difficult endeavors for a leader. Often, theories and approaches available to practitioners and academic researchers are contradictory (Todnem By, 2005). Leadership in a university environment is complex, with various hierarchical levels and management required to make universities function daily (Lombardi, 2013). This complexity of a university environment further challenges leader of organizational change. Examining leader-follower dynamics expands the knowledge of leadership by providing an understanding of leader and follower competencies as described by individuals during organizational change. The purpose of this study was to understand the holistic lived experiences of leaders and the phenomenon of leading organizational change during a vertical merger of two institutions to form one institution of higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do mid-level leaders in higher education describe their experiences during organizational change?
2. How do leaders' self-perceptions of their leadership roles change based on their experiences during organizational change?
3. What are followers' perceptions of their leaders' role in organizational change?
4. How has a leader's role in leading organizational change altered the leader-follower working relationship?

Scope and Limitations

Because the intent of interpretive analysis and qualitative studies is to understand how individuals interpret and create meanings from their surroundings—where they work and live, this phenomenological case study design does not offer the ability to generalize how leadership during change affects leaders in various higher education institutions (Creswell, 2012). By interviewing a purposive sample of higher education leaders and followers working in one university, I sought to understand the lived experience of these individuals in this particular context or case. This research aims to assist other higher education professionals in better understanding a leader's perceptions during organizational change, provide insights into how leaders perceive leading organizational change affects them, and understand how followers and their relationships with their leader are modified during such a change.

Definition of Terms

Following is a list of defined terms for the readers to understand research-specific terminology used in this study. These terms come from organizational change, leadership, followership, and qualitative research. They are presented to aid the reader in understanding the meaning of terms and their significance.

Bracketing: "The first step in phenomenological reduction where the researcher sets aside preconceptions" (Creswell, 2012, p. 284) of his or her understanding of the social world in a "reflective way that allows for curiosity" (Creswell, 2012, p. 8) in a way that makes the familiar strange (Holliday, 2007).

Confirmability: Often equated to objectivity, a way for the researcher to equate truth and meaning to the study (Given, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Constructivism: A theory of knowledge that disallows the existence of an external objective reality independent of an individual from which knowledge may be collected or gained (Given, 2008).

Dyadic relationship: A two-way relationship between leaders and followers that is the basis for Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, a relationship-based leadership theory proposed by Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995).

Epistemology: The "branch of philosophy concerned with theoretical knowledge; it is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7).

Fittingness: Places "emphasis on analyzing the degree to which the situation studied matches other situations in which one is interested" (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 3).

Followership: A "relational role in which followers have the ability to influence leaders via a hierarchical influence, contributing to the improvement and attainment of group and organizational objectives" (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010, p. 559).

Follower: A "person in a dialect relationship with a leader or supervisor, who works in work in unison with the leader to accomplish goals and objectives" (Carsten, Harms, & Uhl-Bien, 2014, p. 18).

Grapevine Network: A "major informal communication medium in organizations" (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998, p. 569).

Hermeneutic analysis: A method that is "interpretive and concentrated on historical meanings of experience and their developmental and cumulative effects on individual and social levels" (Laverty, 2003, p. 15).

Horizontalization: In phenomenology, according to Moustakas (1994), the process of identifying specific statements that are “identified from transcripts that provide information about participants’ lived experiences” (Klenke, 2008, p. 230).

Leadership authority: The “way individuals define their perceptions about the rights, duties, and responsibilities associated with their leader’s position within an organization or social system” (Yukl & Falbe, 1991, p. 422).

Leadership-follower switching: The “intrapersonal process of dynamically switching between leader and follower roles” (Sy & McCoy, 2014, p. 122).

Leadership self-identity: The way a leader thinks of himself or herself based on experiences, knowledge, values, and self-perceptions (Day, Harrison, & Halpin, 2009).

Leadership self-efficacy: A “person’s confidence in his or her abilities to successfully lead a group” (McCormick, Tanguma, & López-Forment, 2002, p. 37).

Lived experiences: The term used in phenomenological studies to “emphasize the importance of individual experiences of people as conscious human beings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 285).

Member checking: The process wherein feedback from participants of a study is requested in order to ensure the researcher has captured their experiences accurately as a form of validity (Creswell, 2013). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “It is the most critical technique for establishing credibility in a qualitative study” (p. 314).

Mid-management: An individual who resides in the middle of organizational hierarchy and is responsible for operational and tactical issues as well as day-to-day management (Likert, 1961).

Mid-level leader: Individuals who reside in the middle of an organization hierarchy, similar to mid-level managers, but who have influence and function as intra-organizational leaders with ability to influence both upward and downward during organizational change (Likert, 1961).

Naturalistic inquiry: Research that focuses on how people behave in natural settings while engaging in life experiences (Given, 2008).

Ontology: The philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (Creswell, 2013). Crotty (2003) described it as “the science of being and the nature of reality” (p. 10).

Phenomena: The “building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

Phenomenology: An approach to research that seeks to capture the essence or meaning of something via an interpretive reduction of “individual experiences with a phenomenon, to a description of the essence” (Creswell, 2013, p. 58).

Phenomenological study: A study that “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon or context” (Creswell, 2013, p. 58).

Peer debriefing: An external review by a third party of the analysis, interpretation, and/or findings of a researcher, usually done by a colleague or mentor (Given, 2008).

Philosophical worldview: A "general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds" (Creswell, 2012, p. 6). Guba (1990) defined it as "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (p. 17).

Qualitative research: An "inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2012, p. 300). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined it as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible" and "are studied in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

Self-efficacy: The "belief that one has the personal capabilities and resources to meet the demands of a specific task" (Bandura, 1977, p. 3).

Sensemaking: The ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). It has to do with the way leaders understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves based on the information surrounding organizational change (Rouleau, 2005).

Sensegiving: The process concerned with attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). It is viewed as how leaders attempt to influence by communicating their thoughts about the change to others and to gain their support and influence organizational reality (Rouleau, 2005).

Snowball sampling: A method of "expanding the sample by asking one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 46).

Social constructionism: A "sensemaking process that relies on a socially generated understanding of the world" (Allen, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, it is based on the idea that knowledge is social in origin; knowledge is not predetermined by some natural order; reality is based on social processes, and language is a medium to understand the world (Allen, 2017).

Theming data: The process of searching for non-overlapping meaning clusters within the data (Klenke, 2008).

Thick description: The process of looking at the rich details of the case and being able to sort out the complexity, thereby creating an understanding of the structure of the social world so that outsiders may be able to understand the experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Transferability: The degree to which findings from a research study can be generalized to a similar setting or context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation: Use of multiple sources of data in the investigation of a research question in order to enhance and ensure findings in qualitative research; sources may include peer debriefs, research notes, observational notes, and additional documents to validate data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao, 2004; Merriam, 1998).

Trustworthiness: The “ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are evident in their research” (Given, 2008, p. 2).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of leading change and the way individuals respond to it has been an interest to researchers since Lewin's (1947) study on social equilibria and force field analysis and Coch and French's (1948) analysis of resistance to change (Ford & Ford, 2012). In the ensuing 70 years, various research studies have examined the interaction of organizational change and leadership. These studies have included research on how organization typologies are affected by organizational change, effective leadership styles' approaches and approaches during change, and what leadership activities are considered most effective during organizational change. It is not surprising that organizational change has been a fertile area of leadership research in part because of the continual fluidity in organizations. In fact, Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) found most organizations undertake moderate organizational changes at least once per year and major changes every 4 or 5 years to survive in the unstable context. Choi and Ruona (2011) wrote that constant change of organizations is one of the features that characterize modern organizations and has become a standard process in today's organizational environment. Bryman (1992) emphasized the importance by asserting that the ability to effectively oversee organizational change is a necessary skill of leaders at all levels and types of organizations.

What, then, is known about leaders and organizational change? Much is known about organizational change, how it manifests, the processes that take place during organizational change, and what leaders do during organizational changes. However, there are still questions about what happens to leaders of the change effort. Some researchers assert that little is known about the effect leaders have on change and less on how change affects the leaders themselves (Burke, 2010; Ford & Ford, 2012).

Leadership

Bass (1990) defined *leadership* as an exchange between two or more members of a group that may involve the modification of a situation, the perceptions, and expectations of the members by one member (leader) of others (followers) within the group. This modification can be viewed as an exchange process that takes place between a leader and follower. In a similar way, Stogdill (1950) defined leadership “as a process of influencing the activities of an organized group in an effort to both set and achieve goals” (p. 3). This interaction is present in all work activities and working environments of organizations. When leadership is viewed from this perspective, a leader both influences and is influenced by his or her followers (Northouse, 2013). This social exchange that exists in leadership rarely happens in a vacuum; it takes place in the context of an organization, team, group, or given context (Williams, 2013). Similarly, Kavanagh and Ashkanasy (2006), when discussing leadership during organizational change, stated, “Leadership is essentially a process of social influence between individuals where each wants to feel included, supported and reinforced” (p. 88).

This traditional view of leadership focuses primarily on an individual phenomenon, specifically on how the individual leader’s behaviors influence follower outcomes. Based on this view, researchers, for the most part, have assumed “effective leadership is key to successful organizational change" (Ford & Ford, 2012, p. 1). Ford and Ford (2012) asserted that when examining leadership during organizational change, there are various forms of effective leadership and ways of leading. Since a lone individual does not lead organizational change on a large scale—the view romanticized in many media assumptions of leadership theory—it becomes important to recognize that both leadership and followership must be considered when reviewing the literature on leading organizational change.

Middle Management or Mid-level Leader

What is a middle manager or, as referred to in this study, a mid-level leader? The terms *manager* and *leader* were used interchangeably in organizational research until the mid-1980s (Bennis & Goldsmith, 2003; Bennis & Naus, 1985). Likewise, middle management has been used to describe individuals who play critical roles in organizational life. One of the first organizational researchers to describe the role middle managers play in organizations was Likert (1961). Likert's view of middle managers' role in organizational structures was that they serve as a linking pin in the organizational chain. His views on management, subordinates, and organizations gave credence to the importance middle management plays in organizational life.

In the development of research on middle management, Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008, defined *middle managers* as individual "managers who are located below top managers or the executive level of an organization and above first-level supervision in the organizational hierarchy" (p. 1192). This definition of middle managers provides a boundary for the role of middle management while assigning individuals in these roles a unique place in organizational life. This definition also establishes the importance of their role in the organizational hierarchy, which allows them to serve as a bond between two sets of groups. First, they serve as a supervisor or superior to one group of frontline managers, and second, they also serve in a subordinate role to the next level up in the organizational hierarchy. Likert (1961) described this arrangement as an “interlinking change” that runs throughout the organization. Thus, middle managers serve as linking pins (Figure 1) who coordinate top-level activities with the day-to-day operations at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy (Likert, 1961).

Floyd and Woodbridge (1992) further expanded and clarified the particular role of middle managers in organizational life, describing them as individuals who were part of multiple, vertically related groups. Floyd and Woodbridge’s view of middle managers’ role is similar to the one defined by Likert’s’ (1961) initial description, but they expanded it by proposing that middle managers’ role in organizational hierarchy is both powerful and unique because of their ability to influence strategic direction as well as operational tactics. In doing so, Floyd and Woodbridge raised the importance level of the role of middle managers in organizations by identifying them as critical cogs within an organization’s structure. Similarly, other researchers have described the role of middle managers as vital to organizations due primarily to their ability to upwardly influence top-level management’s view of organizational circumstances. They do so by being able to provide alternative strategies with “strategic contexts allowing them to influence the alignment of operational issues within an organization” (Wooldridge et al., 2008, p. 1206).

In this particular sense, middle managers can influence organizational change because of their role as linking pins in the organization chain, where their actions have both upward and downward influences on strategy formation. The role played by middle managers is an important and unique feature of individuals in the position because mid-level leaders' access to executive leadership coupled with their knowledge of operations provides them with the ability to influence organizational change (Wooldridge et al., 2008).

This ability to influence becomes a leadership skill used by middle managers, who serve as intra-organizational leaders or mid-level leaders with the apparent ability to influence both upward and downward during organizational change. This distinction and requirement of "coping with change as well as their influence activities are what make the distinction between managers and leaders" (Vecchio, 1997, p. 25). Scholars of education management suggest middle management requires a balance of both administration and leadership skills to be successful, particularly in academic management (Busher, 2005; Glatter, 2006; Glatter & Kydd, 2003).

In a higher education setting, the term mid-level leadership has been used to describe individuals in academic management roles similar to the role of middle management as outlined by organizational behavior scholars (Filan & Seagren, 2003; Lucas, 2000). For the purpose of this dissertation, I use the term *mid-level leader* to describe individuals in mid-level administrator roles in institutions of higher learning. They perform functions similar to the traditional role of middle management employees in a corporate environment. Regardless of what these individuals are called, they serve a distinct role as individuals whose positions lie in the middle of the organization. Their function is both tactical and strategic. Due to their role and location in the hierarchy, they serve as a conduit between executive-level strategy and day-to-day operations (Aucoin, 1989). Mid-level leaders' positions serve a role that enables them to function as mediators between the organization's strategy and daily activities (Nonaka, 1994). In this sense, a mid-level leader and middle manager are both slave and master, serving the needs of both the top and bottom of the organization (Joseph & Winston, 2005). They work as the processing unit of an organization. They act to transfer knowledge and aid in the creation of a shared identity within an organization (King, Fowler, & Zeithaml, 2001; Marshall, 2012). Marshall (2012) suggested that during organizational change, mid-level leaders' roles are primarily concerned with reconciling both top-level leaderships' perspectives with lower level management's implementation issues.

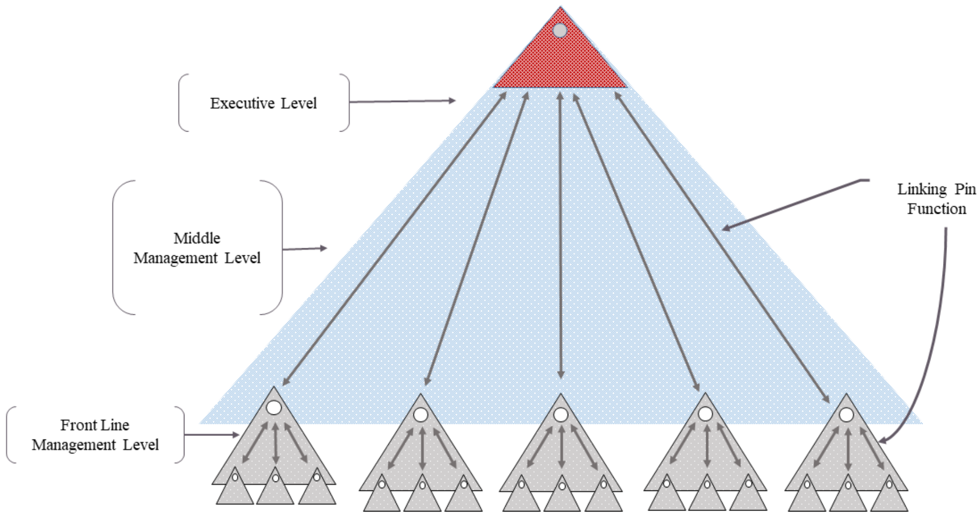

Figure 1. Linking pin function of middle management. Reprinted from *New patterns of management* (p. 119), by R. Likert, 1961, McGraw-Hill, New York, NY. Copyright 1961 by McGraw-Hill. Reprinted with permission.

Self-Efficacy, Leadership Self-Efficacy, and Leadership Self-Identity

Scholars have studied how individuals see themselves (self-efficacy), how leaders think of themselves (leadership self-efficacy), and how leaders define and internalize who they are as leaders based on their experiences (leadership identity). The first construct when discussing leaders' perceptions of themselves and their roles is self-efficacy, which is derived from social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1997) defined *self-efficacy* as "how an individual believes in their capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Various empirical studies on an individual's self-efficacy have shown that it influences how individuals think, react to stress, deal with difficult situations, make decisions, perform work, and deal with organizational change (Bandura, 1982, 1986; Bandura & Wood, 1989; Barling & Beattie, 1983; Campbell & Hackett, 1986; Jimmieson, Terry, & Callan, 2004).

Bandura (1997) asserted that in leadership situations where there is a lack of evident and instantaneous feedback on effectiveness, how an individual perceives themselves on how well they perform becomes a vital source of immediate feedback to their self-efficacy. It can be assumed that an individual's self-efficacy then aids individuals in making judgments and formulating ways to deal with dynamic situations, changing environments, and new experiences.

A second construct derived from Bandura's work is *leadership self-efficacy*, which is defined as "how they perceive their abilities, skills, knowledge, and skills they associate with leading others" (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008, p. 669). Numerous studies have shown that a leader's self-efficacy is a key in regulating how a leader reacts in dynamic environments and is influenced by the individual's self-confidence (Chemers, 2000; McCormick, 2001). The belief in one's abilities to adapt to changing environments becomes a critical component in dealing with organizational change and the related stress acquired in leading during organizational change.

A third leadership concept related to how a leader defines or sees him or herself as a leader is a *self-identity process*. Leadership self-identity is the perception a leader has of oneself—via the use of prior experiences, knowledge, and values—and is used to create an image of oneself (Day et al., 2009). Various scholars have examined how leader self-identity develops, and the process is similar to the development of one's self-identity—it occurs over time, but once it is internalized, it becomes a permanent feature of the person in his or her view of him or herself as a leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005).

Organizational Change

Organizational change has been described as a phenomenon of time wherein differences are observed in one or more dimensions of an organization (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Similarly, Ford and Ford (1994) described this phenomenon as the way people talk about an event in which something, in this case, an organization, turns into something else, which is the result of the outcome. Huber and Glick (1993) defined organizational change as the differences resulting from the modifications of how an organization functions, who its members and leaders are, the form it takes, and how it allocates its resources. Burns (1996) defined an organizational change as how people understand alternations within an organization at the broadest level among groups, individuals, and collectively across the whole organization. These authors' definitions of organizational change describe a disruption of normal activities within organizational life. Moreover, various models have been developed by authors to help describe organizational change, including models that are viewed as systemic, organic, and behavioral, which are natural to all systems (Morgan, 1986).

Lewin (1947) was one of the first to try to explain organizational change when he proposed the classic three-stage model of change. In Lewin's model, he depicted unfreeze, change, and refreeze, wherein one makes a case for change because of dissatisfaction with the current state (unfreeze), then uses resources to make modifications to the organization (change), and then ensures the changes become the organizational norm via processes and procedures (refreeze). This model is based on the explicit assumption that organizational change is a linear, step-based process (Figure 2). Lewin's model for organizational change, therefore, implies that organizational leaders can implement in a consistent, repetitive process across the organization (Beckhard, 1969; Hammer & Champny, 1993; Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Kotter, 1990).

Similarly, Kotter's (1996) work on leading change proposed an 8-step approach for leading organizational change, which, according to Higgs and Rowland (2005), still shared the concept that organizational change is conducted in a uniform and predictable fashion across the organization.

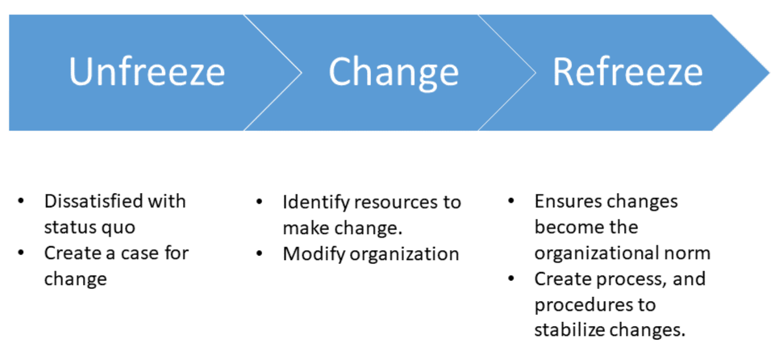

Figure 2. Lewin three-stage model of change. Reprinted from "Frontiers in group dynamics: I. Concept, method and reality in social sciences; social equilibria and social change" by K. Lewin, 1947, *Human Relations, 1*, p. 5-41. Copyright 1947 by SAGE publications.

However, other researchers have suggested organizational change is complex and evolutionary, occurs in a nonuniform or nonpredictable way, and evolves, at times creating unintended outcomes (Reynolds, 1997; Sammut-Bonnici & Wensley, 2002; Senge, 1999). Those holding this second view of organizational change argue that organizational change cannot be a top-down process and is not uniform but emergent in how it unfolds and is messy. The complexity of organizational change is scaffolded by the relationship among individual actors and the system (Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Litchenstein, 1997; P. Shaw, 2003; R. B. Shaw, 1997). This complexity is therefore tied to organizational actors who then guide and help create a new order and behaviors within a complex system.

In higher education, Kezar (2001) described something like Higgs and Rowlands' (2005) evolutionary and complex view of organizational change. Kezar's views of organizational change mirror those of earlier authors who viewed organizational change as a byproduct of the actions of individuals (Litchenstein, 1997; R. B. Shaw, 1997). Kezar (2001) asserted that because of higher education's distinctive features, organizational change is best "interpreted from three distinct evolutionary models, social cognition, cultural, and political" (p. 8), where the political is the process of persuasion, informal negotiations, and coalition-building as methods for creating change (Conrad, 1978); social cognition involves the modification of mental models, organizational learning, and a series of interactions for constructing change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a; Weick, 1995); and cultural is the use of symbolism, history, and traditions valued by the institution as a mechanism to institute change (Cohen & March, 1974; Kezar & Eckel, 2002b).

Another form of organizational change that is more typical in a business enterprise is an organizational merger, which usually entails the integration of two organizations into one by integrating some or all parts and organizational functions into a new organization (Seo & Hill, 2005). These types of organizational change have been described by researchers as being extremely difficult to manage due to the large-scale organizational change and the traumatic impact it has on employees, including outcomes such as layoffs, turnover, and stress illness (Fried, Tiegs, Naughton, & Ashforth, 1996; Newman & Krzystofiak, 1993).

Mergers and Acquisitions

A *merger* is defined as "the combination of two or more legal separate institutions that surrender their independent legal identities in favor of a new organizational identity under [the] formal control of a single governing body" (Harman, 2002, p. 94). Mergers (and acquisitions) are a form of organizational change, and this type of change, seen as a way to enhance the merging organizations, is traditionally studied from a financial or strategic management research viewpoint (Cartwright & Schenberg, 2006)—a financial view looking at the creation of value for the shareholders and a strategic view studying the strategic fit. It is based on resource sharing or knowledge creation that, in turn, leads to a greater overall organization.

Haleblian, Devers, McNamara, Carpenter, and Davision's (2009) study of mergers and acquisitions found that they can be "categorized by intent, which includes value creation, managerial self-interest, firm characteristics, and environmental factors" (p. 473). Those terms are defined as follows:

- Value creation is the ability of a firm to increase its value via increasing market power, producing efficiencies, and enhancing the acquiring firm by expanding it into existing areas of strength while extending themselves into new areas.
- Managerial self-interest is the ability of executive management to be able to increase compensation as well as discretionary power, thereby allowing for a future entrenchment and reducing their employment risk.
- A firm characteristic is the suggestion that firms choose to acquire or merge based on one of the firms having been historically successful with acquisitions, thereby being more likely to continue to that success and to continue to engage in the future.
- An environment factor is the "environmental uncertainty that affects whether firms select to acquire or opt for other cooperative means" (p. 473).

However, there is still much to learn about both mergers and acquisitions. For example, Haleblian et al. (2009) noted that because "reasons/drivers of mergers and acquisitions remain unanswered, there is merit in continuing to search for factors that drive mergers and acquisition" (p. 492).

Mergers and Acquisitions in Higher Education

The advent of the financial pressures from the Great Recession of 2007 made mergers and acquisitions a viable option for higher education institutions to use to adapt to the changes in environmental factors, including modifications of market dynamics and an increasingly competitive environment. Due to the changing environmental factors in the North American higher education sector, leaders of higher education have explored various organizational modifications. The options primarily used to address these current challenges include development of systems of shared services, shared campuses, organizational affiliations, public-private partnerships, and many others (Martin & Samels, 2016; Thomas & Chabotar, 2015).

In higher education, mergers are classified distinctly from those of the corporate sector and are "voluntary and involuntary, consolidations and take-overs, single sector and cross-sectoral, twin partner and multi-partner, of a similar academic profile ('horizontal') and different academic profile ('vertical') mergers" (Harman & Meek, 2002, p. 2). However, the use of mergers and acquisitions in universities are still rare and often only used as an option of last resort. Nevertheless, the use of mergers seems to be increasing, with a total of 24 mergers (regardless of type) in North American higher education since 2010 compared to 22 from 1990-2009 (Azziz, Hentschke, Parthenon-EY, Jacobs, Jacobs, & Ladd, 2017). The term *vertical mergers* is "based on the idea that in an industry there are successive stages of production, some earlier, some later, while horizontal (or lateral) mergers are the amalgamations of enterprises in the same business" (Pritchard, 1993, p. 81). In higher education, a vertical merger is when two institutions combine that have differing levels of academic degrees, while horizontal mergers integrate institutions with similar levels of academic degrees (Harmon, 2002).

In these mergers, there are usually distinctions between the two institutions of higher education; one usually has greater reputation, finances, or political strength. Common in most higher education mergers is that they are also take-overs or acquisitions, whereby one institution is subsumed into another, with the latter retaining its name and presence and the former mostly disappearing as an independent entity (Harman & Meek, 2002).

Minimal research has been conducted in higher education settings on organizational change, and the research that has been conducted in private enterprise "has been too limited to provide a comprehensive explanatory set of sources of issues faced by leaders of mergers" to ensure effectiveness in their leadership and management (Seo & Hill, 2005, p. 423). These various factors affecting organizational change and the ways in which leaders have been examined by researchers provide an understanding of the complexity and difficulty in understanding this phenomenon.

Leadership and Organizational Change

Studying leadership and leading organizational change has used the focused form of leadership as the dominant unit of analysis in examining this phenomenon. Ford and Ford (2012) stated there are two ways to study leaders during change: how a leader approaches organizational change and activities, and how a leader engages while leading organizational change.

Leader's Approach to Organizational Change

According to Higgs and Rowland (2005), leaders in organizations have a predisposition for how they lead change efforts. The method a leader chooses to implement change is based on the implicit assumption that leaders' beliefs and mindsets influence their approach to problem-solving (Finklestein & Hambrick, 1996; Hambrick & Brandon, 1988; Higgs & Rowland, 2005).

Based on their qualitative analysis, the authors derived a typology of four distinct approaches to leading change: *directive*, *master*, *self-assembly*, and *emergent* (Figure 3).

- Directive—Simple change is driven, controlled, managed, and initiated from the top of the organization by a small group of individuals who use rules of thumb; communications are tightly controlled, and engagement is about control of scope/drift timescales, objectives, and use of resources.
- Master—A sophisticated change is driven, controlled, managed, and initiated from the top of the organization or by a small group. The group uses specific change models in which there is extensive engagement by the group influencing change processes who engage individuals in various ways.
- Self-Assembly (DIY)—A simple change with a tightly set direction, where capacity and capability development is required. It is strategically adapted locally, and local managers are accountable for organizational change.
- Emergent—A complex change with few big rules and loosely set direction. Change is initiated anywhere in the organization but usually where there is high contact with client/customers. This change is about diffusion and sharing best practices, where lateral connections are necessary and involve a novel mix of individuals.

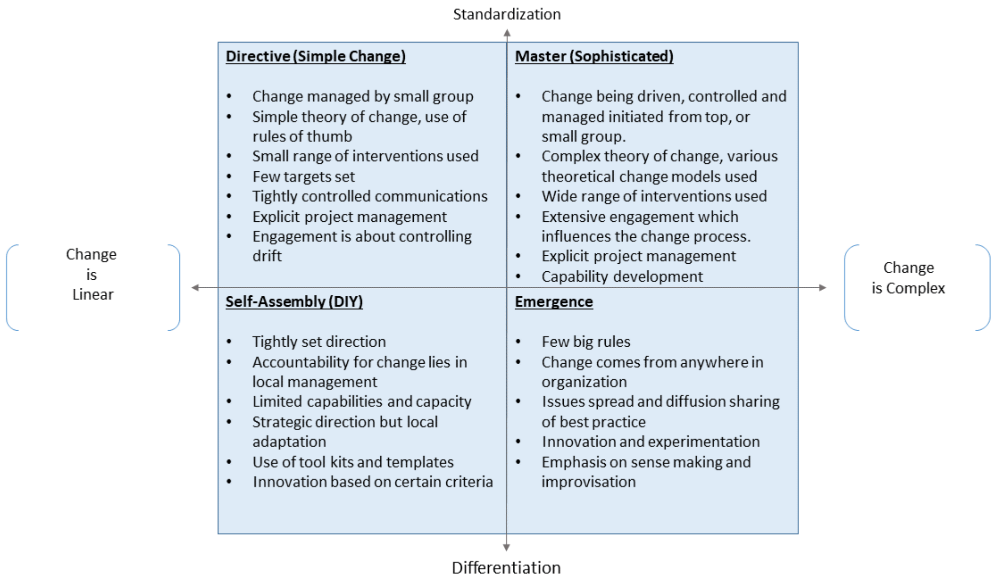

Figure 3. Four organizational change approaches. Reprinted with permission from “All changes great and small: Exploring approaches to change and its leadership” by M. Higgs and D. Rowland, 2005, *Journal of Change Management, 5*(2), p. 121-151. Copyright 2005 by Taylor and Francis.

Higgs and Rowland’s (2005) model described how environmental factors and a leader’s natural approach to solving problems influence how a leader chooses his or her approach in leading an organizational change effort. The methods described are based on the level of complexity of the change and the amount of direction and control from top management. In Higgs and Rowland’s view, leaders have an overall orientation and presupposition on how they approach organizational change efforts. These, along with the amount of control or direction required by a leader, help leaders determine how to lead a change effort. The model makes an explicit assumption that leading change does not, in fact, influence the leader, assuming that the individual leader is unmalleable to the stress that is associated with organizational change.

Another model that examines the approach leaders take in leading change is Kavanagh and Ashkanasy’s (2006) three-tier model of leading organizational change. They examined organizational change at three universities that were merging with three smaller institutions. The three tiers are based on length of time involved in organizational change (in this case, merger). The model includes three types of organizational change approaches leaders take to move an organization through a merger; they described them as immediate, incremental, and indeterminate. In immediate change, a leader moves forward as quickly as possible, not waiting to re-engineer processes or the organizational culture. In an incremental approach, a leader of the change gets everyone involved to discuss concerns about the organizational change. These discussions are done over a finite timeframe, while still moving forward with the change. An indeterminate approach is one that has no finite timeline and various committees discuss the organizational re-alignment, while no structural changes occur until everyone is appeased (Figure 4). In their case analysis, this process took more than 6 years, with no integration of two universities. Their findings suggested the choice of the type of change was based on how distributed the leadership was at each institution rather than the leadership of one individual. In their analysis, leaders chose the organizational change approach based on the organizational culture.

The approach a leader takes to make organizational change happen is dependent on the amount of complexity and the amount of control a leader or group of leaders has on the whole organization. While these two organizational change models provide an understanding of how leaders approach organizational change, they do not provide an understanding of the leaders themselves, or what they believe about their circumstances, or how the organizational change approach or context affects them moving forward.

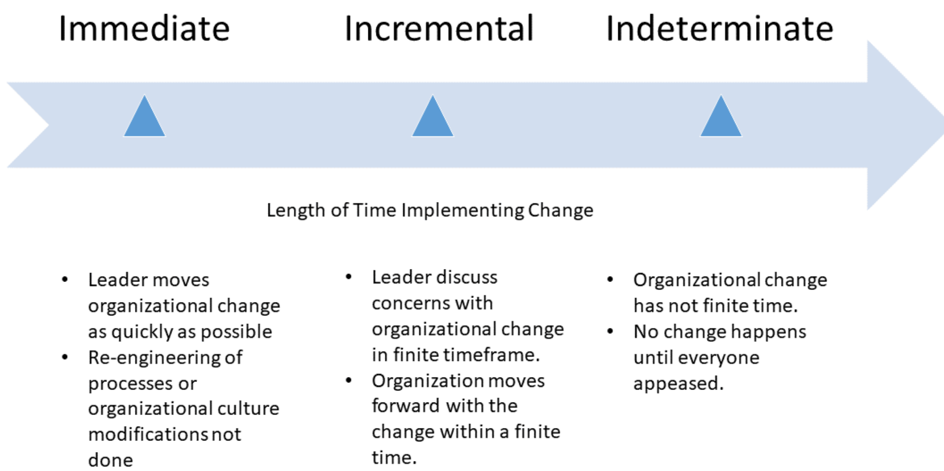

Figure 4. Leadership of organizational change methods. Reprinted with permission from "The Impact of Leadership and Change Management Strategy on Organizational Culture and Individual Acceptance of Change during a Merger" by M. Kavanagh and N. Ashkanasy, 2006, *British Journal of Management*, *17*, p. 81-103. Copyright 2006 and 2017 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Leadership Behaviors

In the study of leading change, earlier researchers used the traditional view of leadership that assumes leaders have a set of behaviors and they consistently apply them over all situations. However, Higgs and Rowland (2005) argued that the leadership behaviors during organizational change are not stable and consistent over time or change situations. According to Higgs and Rowland, (2005) there are three types of leader behaviors associated with leading organizational change: a) influencing behavior, b) organizing behaviors, and c) creating capacity.

The first, influencing behavior, includes communication and other actions related to the change, what the leaders say and do, and how to make others accountable and thinking about the organizational change. Second, a leader uses framing behaviors during organizational change; this includes setting the “road map” that includes designing the journey, creating starting points, and managing the change journey for the organizations. This road map includes communication of guiding principles as well as creating capacity in both individuals and the organization. Higgs and Rowland (2005) viewed organizational change as either a complex or linear process across a standard or differentiated change. The authors believed a leader’s set of standard behaviors will be adapted based on the typology of the change required. It assumes the leader will modify his or her behavioral actions to the type of organizational change. The model fails to examine or explain why and how a leader’s behavior influences his or her approach to organizational change.

The third major leadership behavior used by leaders of organizational change is creating capacity for organizational change. This leadership behavior can be considered enabling and facilitating the type of activities described by Litchenstein (1997) and Conner (1992), whereby the leader is designing the organizational and individual structures for change. These activities include creating the connections via communication and setting up the organizational structures to prepare for the modification. In one sense, this is related to Kotter’s (1996) view that a leader must establish a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change. In their analysis, Higgs and Rowland (2005) found influencing behaviors (what leaders say and do, holding others accountable, thinking about change, and using individual focus) are negatively related to a successful organizational change in all contexts, while framing behaviors (establishing starting points, designing and managing the change journey, and communicating guiding principles) are positively related to short-term, high-scale, and scope organizational change initiatives, which are led individually. Their analysis found in a high magnitude change context (one that includes a large number of people and entails changes to multiple parts of the system) an emergent change approach, and leadership framing behaviors accounted for the highest variance in success (Higgs & Wren, 2005). Leadership behaviors that were centered on position, power, role, and abilities of the leader were not related to the success of the organizational change implementation and could in fact sometimes harm the success of the change implementation (Higgs & Rowland, 2005).

These findings suggest that in a complex organization, a leader’s behavior must be dynamic and adaptive based on the organizational change and the context or environment of the organization. They also provide evidence that organizational change from the top does not work (Higgs & Rowland, 2005). Moreover, these findings elicit questions about how leaders’ behaviors are used in a university environment, which is large and complex. They also do not provide answers to what occurs when a mid-level leader is required to lead change or explain how leaders adapt to the change they are leading.

Leadership Organizational Change Activities

Researchers have also studied leadership of change by examining how often leaders use change activities, practices, and steps to lead change. One example in change management literature is communicating a vision (Kotter, 1996). In this practice, a leader, regardless of their standard leadership behavior, modifies their normal day-to-day activities by either complementing or replacing their standard use of leadership behaviors because of an organizational change event. It is assumed a leader will be successful at leading organizational change if he or she follows a plan and completes steps and actions in an appropriate manner (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008), Other researchers have viewed these leadership activities as competencies needed for successful change.

In Battilana, Gilmartin, Sengul, Pache, and Alexander's (2010) exploratory study, the researchers examined the relationship between leadership competencies and the organizational change activities leaders emphasized. The leadership competencies were based on individual leaders being either task-oriented or people-oriented. The authors examined three organizational change activities: (a) communicating the need for change, (b) mobilizing others to support the change, and (c) evaluating the change implementation.

Study results of Battilana et al. (2010) provided empirical support that "leaders who rated higher on task-oriented behaviors were more likely to use mobilizing and evaluating activities during change, while leaders rated higher on people-oriented behaviors were more likely to use communication activities" (p. 434). The researchers also noted that leaders of large organizations or with advanced degrees were more likely to use communication activities and less likely to focus on mobilizing activities.

However, in leading change, a leader's activities and behaviors do not occur in a vacuum. Leadership happens within the context of an organization and particular work setting (Williams, 2013). Organizational context can impact how and what activities and behaviors a leader uses when implementing change.

Kah and Parry (2004) provided evidence that "groups of leaders, in a particular context, can influence/repress the leader behaviors of another group within the organization," which they described as repressive leadership (p. 478). The authors suggested behaviors and activities such as knowledge of organizational structures, communication within the organization, and collaboration relationships among groups during normal day-to-day operations can support or repress organizational change activities and behaviors of leaders. Their findings suggest that in complex organizations such as hospitals and universities, differing group roles impact how leader behaviors emerge and in what manner. These types of organizations have multiple realities of the organizational life that influence all activities (Kah & Parry, 2004). These multiple realities are similar to what occurs in higher education with staff, administrative, and faculty roles, where each group works from the perspective of a differing view of the organization. Leadership activities in these organizational environments must include a social process of reconciliation of these differences as part of leading organizational change (Kah & Parry, 2004).

Ford and Ford (2012) suggested the relationship between leadership behaviors and leader change activities are inconclusive. The authors argued that even though leaders may have similar views to their approaches toward organizational change, in practice the activities and behaviors leaders exhibit differ. Argyris and Schon (1978) posited that this is due to how a leader's description of his or her approach to change is similar to espoused theories, whereas the behaviors exhibited during changes are more like theories in practice.

Impact of Organizational Change on Leaders

Research of leadership of organizational change has also examined how leading change affects the leaders themselves. Most organizational and leadership studies are considered from the viewpoint of the impact the leaders have on the followers, yet some studies considering the impact of organizational change have focused on those who lead the effort. Organizational changes, by their very nature, disrupt the current organizational state and cause anxiety to those affected by the modification.

In one examination of how organizational change impacts leaders, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) examined a strategic change initiative via an ethnographic analysis of a CEO. The researchers analyzed a strategic change initiative in the context of a large public university. In this analysis, the researchers followed the evolution of leadership approaches and change activities from the CEO to his executive and senior management teams. This study found that over time, leaders directive approach (ordering of activities and process) evolved into a more consultative and team-based approach. The leaders modified their behavior and method of leading as more individuals became involved in the execution and adoption of the strategic change initiative in the university. Gioia and Chittipeddi proposed that the evolution of the leader's behavior reflected the dynamic between sensemaking (providing meaning to strategy-related events) by the leader as a directive approach and sensegiving (construction of a shared vision that can be accepted, understood and acted upon) by followers.

Joffe and Glynn's (2002) study of leading change indicated that leading of change involves not only leading change activities of the followers but building the capacity of the leaders of the change. The processes of leading change reveal some of the weaknesses and missing capabilities in the leaders themselves that were not known at the advent of the change event. The study suggested that leaders need to understand and have self-awareness of their abilities to lead organizational change. This finding suggests that organizational change leadership, while being required of leaders, also requires a unique set of skills that may not be well understood by leaders without proper organizational change management experience. Although the study by Joffe and Glynn pointed out that understanding oneself and his or her abilities is important, it also raised the issue of what occurs when a top-down approach is used, and the middle-level leaders have organizational change thrust upon them.

Eriksen's (2008) autoethnographic analysis described the lived experience of how one individual leader was affected by leading an organizational change in the United States Coast Guard. Eriksen surmised that although organizational policies change, it is only through modifications of the organizational members' relationships with one another that meaningful organizational change can occur. In his findings, he suggested that leading organizational change affects relationships with members and the leader through a process that must first start with the leader. The leader must adapt and engage in self-reflection, self-authorship, and practical reflexivity. This process then allows for a meaningful self-transformation of the leader (Eriksen, 2008). In that regard, leading change is not a rational, abstract, and objective endeavor. It is rather an experience that is a social, open-ended, interactive, contingent, transactional, and relationally-responsive activity (Cunliffe, 2001; Bergmann Lichtenstein, 2000; Gergen 1994; Shotter, 1993). Eriksen's (2008) study suggested leaders experience change much like their followers—internally as an embodied experience, where self-awareness and understanding of leading change is not just about the followers but the leader themselves. Because the study viewed only one individual's experience of what it is like for a leader to lead organizational change, it did not discuss how to lead a complex change with multiple leaders and followers.

In a series of case studies focusing on pluralistic organizations like hospitals and universities, Denis et al. (2001) found that leaders are impacted by change due to the nature of working in linked hierarchical relationships. These leaders, although having official roles and responsibilities, act as part of a "leadership constellation" in which no actor has a dominant power, thereby resulting in order having to be negotiated.

Leadership in these organizations are co-performing, (shared via individuals). In this negotiated order, a leader must manage three types of relationships: strategic, organizational, and environmental. Strategic describes relationships among other members of the leadership constellation, organizational depicts relationships between leaders and their followers, and environmental depicts relationships between the team and external entities (Denis et al., 2001). Due to these dynamics, organizational change is not a smooth linear process, but a series of intermittent and sporadic processes where major change occurs when proper alignment occurs (Denis et al., 2001).

Denis et al. (2001) found that these constellations evolve through organizational change and either enable or limit successful change. In this case analysis, the authors found that individuals leading change, while initially successful in pushing change forward, eventually became unsuccessful. The findings suggested that if political and strategic relationships were not properly managed, the other leaders undid the change agents' authority, slowed the change initiative, and in one case, caused the change leader to leave the organization. Denis et al. described leadership in these types of organizations as being dynamic, collective, situated, and dialectic. In these types of organizational contexts, leading organizational change places both individual leaders and the leadership constellation under stress.

Followership

Researchers have long known followers and followership are essential to leadership. One of the earliest studies of followership came from sociology, wherein Sanford (1950) described leadership as an "intricate relation between leader and followers, where leaders need to meet the needs of their followers to maintain a desirable working relationship" (p. 183), whereas Hollander and Webb's (1955) study was one of the first studies to discuss followership and focus on the interdependence of leaders and their followers and posit that good leadership requires followership. In the 1960s, Hollander and Julian (1969) added to followership literature with their study of the relationship between leaders and followers. In it, they explained that leader and follower relationships are implicit exchanges, and there exists a two-way influence relationship between the two. Hollander and Julian's study further added to the importance of followership by describing the nature of these leader-follower relationships and concluding that their implicit two-way exchange relationships influence and mature over time (Baker, 2007).

Hollander (1974) continued adding to the literature on leadership and followership by proposing ideas about which roles and their processes both leaders and followers play within organizations. Hollander suggested that leader and follower relationships were fluid in nature and were dependent on the situation; sometimes leaders were also followers, and, to a certain extent, the behaviors attributed to leaders could be possessed by followers. This behavior could include the "two-way influence process between a leader and follower, which later became central concepts and themes in follower literature" (Baker, 2007, p. 53).

While research on followership has existed, some have argued few followers have been adequately examined in leadership research (Yukl, 2012). Evidence of followership studies in research literature has existed since the 1950s, yet many authors suggested it has not been given its appropriate place in leadership or organizational change research (Hollander, 1992; Baker, 2007; Crossman & Crossman, 2011).

Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien (2012) argued that this has occurred because leadership has not been understood as a process that is co-created via social and relational interactions between people. Leadership as exemplified in this view can only exist if there is followership, meaning that following behaviors are a critical component of the leadership process (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Although many authors agree that leadership is impossible without followers, followership during organizational change has rarely been examined.

Followership Models

Challeff (1995, 2009), Kellerman (2008), and Kelley (1992) offered three distinctive views and models on followership: one from the view of aspirational behaviors, another from motivations and engagement, and the third on an individuals' capacity based on independent and/or critical thinking aptitude, respectively. The first is courageous followership, formulated by Chaleff (1995), which describes followership as prescriptive and provides a set of behaviors that followers should exhibit as opposed to what they do in their organizational life. This model creates a list of five potential components of an ideal follower who is judged to represent courageous followership: (a) the courage to take responsibility for oneself and the organization and perceive exchange for growth and opportunities from his or her leaders or the organization; (b) the ability to take on new responsibilities to relieve the leader of activities; (c) the ability to challenge the leader when the leader's behaviors and polices conflict with him or herself or those of the group; (d) the ability to actively participate in transformational change processes; and (e) the courage to oppose a damaging leader who he or she believes is hurting the team, unit, or organization.

The second typology is by Kellerman (2007, 2008), who viewed followership by how the leader/follower relationship motivates and influences a follower's level of engagement. Kellerman's (2008) typology focused on whether a follower perceives the leader as being either good (effective and ethical) or bad (ineffective and unethical). This judgment by the follower then helps explain how and what a follower's level of engagement will be and his or her willingness toward the level of dominance or deference in the relationship with the leader (Kellerman, 2007). Kellerman's (2008) typology describes five types of follower styles residing on a continuum where individuals can be placed based on how they regard their relationship with a specific leader. These five are isolates, bystanders, participants, activists, and diehards, where individuals.

Kelley's (1992) followership typology categorized followers based on the dimensions of thinking and acting. In regard to the thinking dimension, Kelly viewed followers in two ways: independent and dependent. (a) Independent followers are critical thinkers who consider the impact of their actions, are willing to be creative and innovative, and may offer criticism. (b) Dependent followers are uncritical thinkers who only do what they are told and accept the leader's thinking.

The second dimension, acting, determines a follower's sense of ownership in two ways—active or passive. An active follower takes the initiative in decision making. A passive follower, on the other hand, limits his or her involvement to being told what to do by the leader (Figure 5).

Kelly (1992) went on to define follower types based on a follower quadrant containing the following types of followers:

- **Alienated** followers are followers who have a healthy skepticism of the organization. They are mavericks who are capable but cynical.
- **Conformist** followers are followers who are very active in doing the organization's work and will actively follow orders. These are considered the "yes people" of the organizations.
- **Passive** followers are followers who require constant direction and rely on leaders to think for them.
- **Exemplary** followers are critical to organizational success. They are independent, innovative, and willing to question leadership.
- **Pragmatic** followers are politically aware, provide mediocre effort, and are averse to risk and are more concerned with their survival within the organization.

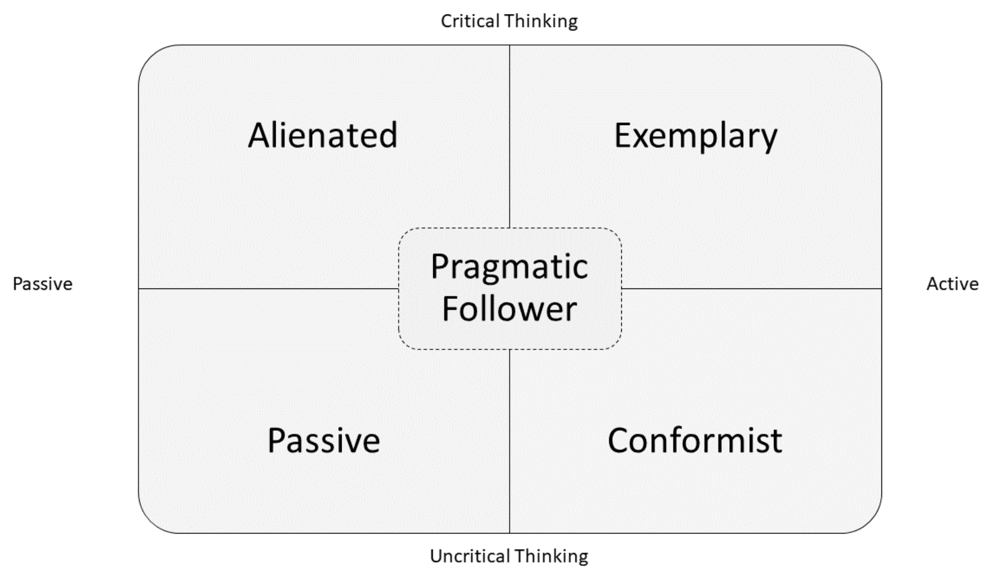

Figure 5. Kelley's typology of followership. Reprinted from *The power of followership: How to create leaders people want to follow and followers who lead themselves*, (p. 97), by R. E. Kelley, 1992, New York, NY: Doubleday/Currency. Copyright 1992 by Penguin Random House LLC. Reprinted with permission.

Kelley's (1992) work provides the ability to categorize followers based on normal work behaviors. Leadership is dyadic and does not exist without followers. In a sense, leaders are meaningless without followers (Kelley, 2008). However, there is still a lack of studies that provide evidence on what occurs to the leader and follower during organizational change. During my review of literature, I found no study where followership using Kelley's typology was used in the examination of a leader's role during organizational change.

Followership and Organizational Change

The study of leadership and organizational change has been studied extensively, while followership in organizational change has not received much emphasis by organizational change and leadership researchers. The limited studies that link followers and organizational change consist of studies about follower’s commitment to organizational change, follower’s perceptions of organizational change, and how followers make sense of organizational change.

One of the original studies to examine followers’ reactions to organizational change was done by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). They proposed a three-component model that describes how employees were committed to organizational change. The three distinct behaviors were compliance, cooperation, and championing. Herscovitch and Meyer suggested employees were committed to the organization change via compliance because they were aware of the associated cost to employees if they did not support the change. This approach was based on the concept of going through the change because there could be punitive damage to the individual employee if he or she did not support the change.

In the second example of commitment cooperation, followers were committed to organizational changes because there was an obligation to the organization to perform their duty. These individuals felt there was a sense of responsibility in performing their jobs and therefore would commit to the organizational change. Finally, by championing an organizational change, a follower demonstrates a sense of attachment to the organization. This attachment then leads to a desire by the individual follower to support the organizational change. Although this model has been used to examine matters across a variety of contexts, it has not been studied in conjunction with a leadership-followership model. While prior research has shown that employees who have good working relationships with their leaders tend to be more committed to their organizations, there is nothing to suggest that this holds true during organizational change (Bauer & Erdogan, 2015).

Followers' Perceptions of Organizational Change

A second way in which followers are studied in organizational change is through their own perceptions. Macri, Tagliaventi, and Bertolotti (2002) suggested that an individual's perception of an organizational change plays a fundamental role in that person's interpretation and view of change. If a follower perceives the organizational change will mean a loss of control and modifications of routines, traditions, and relationships with fellow employees and leaders, it can lead to resistance to organizational change.

In a similar analysis of how followers interpret change, Lau and Woodman (1995) found followers interpret organizational change initiatives for two reasons: to determine the causes of change and to understand the significance of organizational change. The followers make a conceptual map of the changes based on their past experiences and beliefs. This preconceived view of organizational change by followers along with how a leader presents the change can influence the followers' perceptions of the organizational change. The authors suggested that followers do this to make predictions about organizational change outcomes because they care more about the personal impact and outcomes of such changes.

Followers Making Sense of Organizational Change

A third method used by researchers to study followers and organizational change is to examine how followers make sense of the phenomena. Bryant and Wolfram Cox (2004) examined how organizational change affected employees. The study's focus was unique because it explored the experiences of organizational change only from a follower's perspective. The authors found that employees use their own conversion stories to characterize and positively embrace upper management-initiated organizational change to make sense of the organizational change that has modified their daily work lives.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by several models, including Porras and Silver's (1991) Planned Process Model of Organizational Change, Higgs and Rowland's (2005) Rowland Fisher Lexon Consulting (RFLC) Four-Approach Model of Leading Organizational Change, and Hollander and Julian's (1969) Model of Relationship-Based Leadership.

Planned Process Model of Organizational Change

In Porras and Silver's (1991) model, they suggested that organizational changes, where interventions occur, are made to affect certain variables (i.e., organizational performance enhances individual performance). This, in turn, affects individual behaviors and approaches that lead to an overall improvement in an organization's performance and the enhancement of individual development (Figure 6). Modification of the change is based on two types of changes: organizational transformation and organizational development.

Organizational transformation is concerned with the modification of vision (mission, purpose, and guiding principles). Organizational development is concerned with the modification of work settings (reporting lines, social factors, technology, and physical settings), which in turn modifies various organizational members' cognitive views that then lead to behavior modifications. Those behavior modifications then produce organizational outcomes (improved performance and enhanced individual member development).

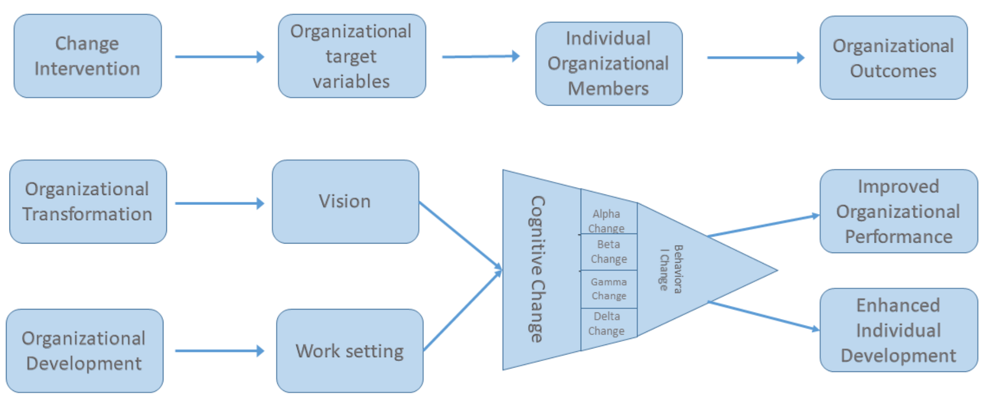

Figure 6. Planned process model of organizational change. Reprinted with permission from "Organization development and transformation" by J. Porras and R. Silvers, 1991, *Annual Review of Psychology*, *42*(1), p. 51-78. Copyright 1991 by Annual Review, Inc.

Porras and Robertson (1992) enhanced this view by explaining that for organizational change to occur, organizational members must alter their on-job behaviors in appropriate ways. This belief is rooted in the assumption that behaviors of the members are influenced by the organizational setting in which the change is occurring (Burke, 2014). Porras and Robertson saw it from an organizational development (OD) perspective, where change efforts are intended to make differences in the organizational work setting to enhance individual development and improve organizational performance. Organizational change leads to pressure and stress for leaders, in turn modifying the relationships and behaviors of leaders and their followers. Within a pluralistic organization, this modification impacts the social networks that must exist in a group based on the OD perspective.

Higgs and Rowland's Model of Approaches to Organizational Change

In Higgs and Rowland's (2005) model, environmental factors and a leader's natural approach to solving problems influence how a leader approaches leading organizational change. Their typology describes how to identify organizational change in an organization; the model has four distinct approaches to leading change: directive, master, self-assembly, and emergent (see Figure 7).

In the directive approach, the change is simple. It is controlled, managed, and initiated from the top of the organization by a small group. They use rules of thumb and a communication process to control the change processes tightly. By contrast, the self-assembly—or do-it-yourself (DIY)—organizational change process is a simple organizational change with a tightly set direction, where the development of capacity and capability is required. While strategic, it is adapted locally, and local managers are accountable for organizational change outcomes.

In more complex organizational change contexts, the remaining two approaches Higgs and Rowland (2005) described are appropriate. The master approach is used when a change is sophisticated and is driven by top management or a small group. It uses specific change models and an extensive engagement process that influences how change is introduced and how and when members are engaged in the change process. On the other hand, the emergent approach is used when there is complex organizational change with few big rules and a loosely set direction. Change is initiated anywhere in the organization but usually where there is high contact with client/customers. This change is about diffusion and the sharing of best practices—where lateral connections are important—and usually involves a novel mix of individuals.

Change Approach	Linear vs Complex	Standardised vs Differentiated
Directive	Linear	Standardised
Self-Assembly	Linear	Differentiated
Master	Complex	Standardised
Emergent	Complex	Differentiated

Figure 7. Organizational change typologies. Reprinted with permission from “All changes great and small: Exploring approaches to change and its leadership” by M. Higgs and D. Rowland, 2005, *Journal of Change Management*, *5*(2), p. 121-151. Copyright 2005 by Taylor and Francis.

Relationship-Based Leadership

Hollander and Julian (1969) described leadership as a process involving an influence relationship between the leader and other participants. This relationship consists of transactions or exchanges that occur between leaders and followers. Hollander and Julian’s model of leadership focuses on the process of these relationships. In later studies, Hollander (1995) stated that leadership is a shared experience, where the leader-follower relationship is the leader’s perception of him or herself relative to followers and how they (followers), in turn, perceive the leader. This entity-based perspective (individual’s view of reality) therefore views leadership as a process that is in the perception and cognition of the individuals involved in the relationship. It is from this perspective that the current study views leadership—as the relationship between the leader and follower during organizational change. It guides the selection of a methodological approach to gain an understanding of leadership as a process during organizational change.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Research Design

Many studies in leadership have been grounded in quantitative methodology. Therefore, much understanding of leadership in theory and practice has developed into context-free generalizations, which has resulted in incorrect conclusions about how a phenomenon is modeled (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Klenke, 2008). Because quantitative inquiry typically focuses on a single level of analysis, it is, therefore, unable to adequately explain a variety of factors that affect leadership, including behaviors, interpersonal relationships, organizational structures, and environmental context (Avolio & Bass, 1995; Conger, 1998; Portugal & Yukl, 1994).

Various authors have argued that the use of qualitative methods is ideal when studying leadership because leadership is a complex, embedded phenomenon and a multidisciplinary field (Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996; Conger, 1998; Klenke, 2008). Thus, the use of qualitative methods provides the researcher with the opportunity for thorough exploration of the context and underlying structures of the leadership phenomenon (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman et al., 1996; Conger, 1998). Bryman (2004) clearly supported the use of qualitative research methods in the study of leadership: "Qualitative research on leadership has greatly enhanced our appreciation of the significance of leaders as makers of meaning, an aspect that is difficult to gain access to through quantitative investigation" (p. 762).

My search for a topic and research questions led me to examine this phenomenon through a constructivist epistemological view, where knowledge is based on the context and meanings derived from interactions with others (Creswell, 2012). The subjects of these interactions include the researcher, the participant leaders, their followers, and the context in which these interactions occur.

Ontology

As the researcher, my deliberate investigative approaches about decisions, the selection of methodology, participant sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis were based on my professional experiences, background knowledge, leadership experiences, and personal development. This led me to what is defined as my view, or *ontology*, "the philosophy of reality, and the claims researchers make regarding knowledge" (Klenke, 2016, p. 15). My ontological view, along with the assumption the phenomena is complex and unforeseen issues can be expected, provided the foundation in the design of my research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The study of leadership, leaders, and followers during organizational change and interactions among them is a human practice. I stipulate that Crotty's (2003) assertion is valid: He stated, "All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality, is contingent upon human practices, is constructed by the interaction between human beings and their world, and is developed, and transmitted via a social context" (p. 42). Through these assumptions, I empathized with the worldviews and lived experiences of the leader and follower participants, which further aligned the epistemological directions of this study.

Role of Researcher

In the social constructivism paradigm, truth is assumed to be what two or more people agree upon (Creswell, 2012). In my role as a researcher, I engaged equally with my participants to ensure I accurately captured the essence of their lived experiences. With this approach, I worked as the researcher and tried to make sense of the participants' experiences while getting a sense of what was going on with them (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

The qualitative nature of the study required that I be both the researcher and the instrument of data collection; therefore, I had to acknowledge and make known my knowledge, background, and what is being examined. Doing so allowed the research to be free of the "known facts" of the case in question (Moustakas, 1994). One of the first steps in this qualitative study was to acknowledge that I, as a researcher, have a background in both higher education and organizational change.

As an individual with more than 20 years' experience in higher education environments (working as a both a leader and follower), I brought to this research study my views and thoughts on approaches to leadership in an organizational setting. I framed my view using Senge's (2006), definition of *mental models*. He defined them as "conceptual frameworks consisting of generalizations and assumptions from which we understand the world and take action in it" (p. 8). Using this approach allowed me to view the information from the participants' first-person accounts (Klenke, 2008; Moustakas, 1994).

These are some of the assumptions that I believe and recognize as a leader and follower in higher education setting. First, leadership is difficult because it involves needing to motivate individuals with limited reward systems and the ability to master many areas of interest, including financial, political, and social dynamics. It involves creating the best of what exists based on a series of collaborative decisions that are inherent to how decision structures work in higher education. These decision-making structures can change; while most decisions are collaborative, some can be authoritative, and others are left to the mid-level leaders. This complex, shared authority and decision-making environment in higher education makes leading a challenge and leading change extremely difficult.

Second, leaders in this setting may have individual followers—who could range from individuals with a high school education to those who or are considered highly educated (e.g., PhDs, MSs, and MBAs)—with distinct voices and opinions on both tactical and strategic direction. Finally, as an individual who has worked and lived through various changes in different organizational settings, I also bring some of those experiences with me. I have created new organizations via the merger of distinct groups in both the private and public sector, and I bring some of those insights with me as I conduct my research. These include a sense of righteousness in one's view, stubbornness in one's views of the change, and lack of thoughtfulness on how this approach impacts individuals one leads.

These assumptions needed to be set aside to allow me to look at the data cleanly, to view it through the lens of each of the participants and their experiences. The ability to do this is called bracketing, or *epoche*, which means I set aside my assumptions and expose what I believe leading change means in order to view the data in a fresh and unique way and from the participants' points of view and their shared lived experiences (Klenke, 2008; Moustakas, 1994).

Epistemology

A constructivist epistemology asserts "knowledge is based on the way we engage with the world," and this social engagement then aids in interpretation based on social context (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). This constructivist approach was best suited for this research project because the goal was to explore how leader and follower participants derive meaning from their lived experiences via their social constructions through interview dialogue (Charmaz, 2006; Klenke, 2008, 2016).

Because data were collected via dialogue, a constructive view embraces that the interaction and the relationship between the researcher-respondent is subjective, interactive, interdependent, and context-specific; therefore, all parts of research are influenced by the researcher, participants, and research site (Lincoln &Guba, 1989). This exploration of a complex reality from multiple perspectives of how leaders and followers alike experienced and described leading during organizational change best lent itself to a constructivist epistemological view.

Qualitative Analysis

Once I had defined my constructivist epistemology, I then set out to develop my research framework. Defining my research framework began with the process of discovery and initial analysis, wherein I sought to understand the perceptions of the participants and how they lived through organizational change rather than more quantifiable variables or experimental designs. This constructivist worldview shaped my thoughts on how I would seek to understand how people—in this case, leaders and followers—experienced organizational change, and it led me to a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative approach is often the most effective way to uncover particular and situated dynamics when leading organizational change (Klenke, 2008).

Because I was looking at how change affects individuals, the use of a qualitative inquiry allowed me to obtain rich insight into how and why change unfolds in organizations and its impacts at various levels of analysis (Gray et al., 2012). I used an inductive approach in my data collection and analysis for this study through which I sought to explain the complexity of a social phenomenon through defining patterns as they arose into resulting findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

I chose the use of in-depth interviews with participants to allow for a reexamining of their experiences during change, which aided in the construction of meaning. The inductive approach, in which data are collected in an evolving manner through semi-structured open-ended inquiry, allowed me to actively engage in illuminating the social meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2012). This emergent investigative approach was designed to allow for a rich and thorough analysis of what it means to be a mid-level leader during organizational change. Using this technique allowed new data to flow naturally based on the dialogue during the interview process.

The form of analysis I chose for this study was phenomenological due to the nature of this inquiry.

Phenomenology

I engaged in careful, deliberate, and thoughtful analysis in the selection of a phenomenological study that aligned with my research questions concerning leadership. In his case study on leading during organizational change, Merriam (2002) defined a phenomenological study as a means to examine individual experiences not explored in everyday life. *Phenomenology* is primarily “the study of the lived experience, which emphasizes how the person lives and interacts in their world” (Klenke, 2016, p. 207). A phenomenological researcher intends to understand the phenomenon. In this case, the leaders during organizational change, as expressed by individual experiences, lived that change, and their beliefs and recollections and understandings—their lived experiences—were expressed using their own terms (Creswell, 2012). Case studies are a type of qualitative method ideally suited for exploratory and richly descriptive studies that emphasize the multiple realities existing within the case (Creswell, 2012; Klenke, 2008; Stake, 1995).

Case Selection

In the selection of a case, purposeful, operational construct and intensity sampling methods were used to target cases purposively. Patton (1990) defined *operational constructs* as real-world examples, or operational examples of the constructs in which one is interested. *Intensity sampling* refers to selecting cases specifically for their ability to provide information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, and *similar purposeful sampling* is the ability to provide information-rich cases for in-depth study.

These sampling methods guided the selection criterion in the context of a higher education organization that has recently gone through transformational organizational change (Burke, 2014). This criterion was consistent with the basic context of the study of how leaders experience leadership during organizational change. In qualitative studies, the research objectives are what guide the direct sampling procedures (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

1. How do mid-level leaders in higher education describe their experiences during organizational change?
2. How do leaders' self-perception of their leadership roles change based on their experiences during organizational change?
3. What are followers' perceptions of their leaders' role in organizational change?
4. How has a leader's role in leading organizational change altered the leader-follower working relationship?

The case was selected because it provided for rich detail of a unique organizational change via a merger between two higher education institutions in the southern United States—University A and University B. University A is a large, comprehensive doctoral research institution with enrollment figures of approximately 50,000 students. University B is a majority graduate, professional, and specialty-focused institution with an enrollment around 2,100.

Before the merger, each university had its own senior executive leadership structure and well-defined organizational and operational management structures. The vertical merger of these two universities modified the operating structures, operational approaches, and processes of both organizations. As part of these changes, some of the organizational hierarchy and executive leadership was maintained while other management and leadership roles and responsibilities of individuals in the universities were modified. The vertical merger of these two higher education institutions is an example of a critical case that provided the researcher with insights of organizational change at a university—specifically who, what, and in which way mid-level leaders and followers implemented the above organizational change (Patton, 2001).

The modification of operating structures provided a rich set of data, including how these modifications to the day-to-day operational activities affected mid-level leaders and the followers who were required to enact them. Second, it provided an excellent insight into what leaders face during an organizational change at a higher education institution, providing for a rich example of the lived experiences. Finally, the case was highly unusual within higher education because vertical mergers in higher education do not occur very often. Based on this researcher's review of the literature, only two other cases were found to have occurred in the last 10 years, (August University and Rutgers University) and neither of them has been studied extensively.

For this research, a single case study approach was ideal to explore the intricacies of leadership and followership during organizational change in a higher education institutional environment. Because the study's focus was exploring the lived experiences of individuals from two organizations merging into a single organization, a phenomenological case study was selected. This qualitative approach was driven by and based on the type of research questions being asked—specifically the desire to understand mid-level leaders' experiences with leading organizational change and what this experience had on their relationships with their followers. This research design allowed for special attention to be given to the relationships among organizational change, higher education environment, and perception of change by leaders and their followers.

Participants

Selection Process

I began to identify possible key informants before I received Institution Review Board (IRB) approval of my research study. I discussed with my faculty dissertation chair possible key informant(s) who could aid in the identification of the best possible participants. The goal of this initial discussion was to identify an informant who could provide me with a rich set of individuals who would be invited to participate in the study.

Because the goal of phenomenological research is to understand the lived experience, interview participants were selected via criterion sampling and identified by a key informant. Once three possible candidates for the role of informant emerged, I set up meetings to discuss my research goal broadly to gain a better understanding of who was the best candidate. I did this by asking a simple question: "What do you know about the merger between University A and University B?" and I followed that question with, “Can you tell me who you believe the leaders were at the mid-level rank who were directly impacted by this organizational change?” Based on my discussions with the three possible candidates, I selected a high-ranking individual who was knowledgeable and understood the overall process that took place during the organizational change.

One research sample criterion for this study were individuals who met the study’s purpose: in this case, leadership of organizational change. A second criterion was that individual leaders be involved in a substantial organizational change—in this case, the merger of two higher education institutions.

All participants were individuals involved with the organizational change and were from multiple levels within the organization—middle to upper middle leaders at both University A and University B, 3 and 2 participants, respectively. These included individual with titles common in higher education, from Administration Vice Provost to Director of Operations, (General titles from High Ed Jobs used) or individuals a step below their respective executive leadership tier (e.g., President, Chancellor or Chief Academic Officer, Chief Financial Officer) and above the first line manager (e.g., Associate Deputy, Associate Director) at their respective institutions. This allowed me as the researcher to gather multiple perspectives from various individuals at different levels of the organizations with a focus on what they experienced in leading during organizational change. The collection of interview data from multiple sources and at different levels of the organization allowed data triangulation (Merriam, 2009). This broad view of how the organizational change affected mid-level leaders and their followers aided in understanding the essence of the phenomenon of leading during change (Creswell, 2012). This nested design approach may aid other researchers if they wish to pursue a similar qualitative research study.

Once approval was received by the IRB (Study Number IRB2016-0075D), the key informant helped to provide an initial list of individuals who were part of the organizational change and whose areas were modified by the organizational change; thus, these were good candidates for participation. The key informant provided five possible candidates to be invited to participate in the study. The five were identified as leaders in mid-level organizational roles at the two higher education institutions who had a lived experience of leading organizational change.

I then contacted each of the individuals identified by the key informant and asked them if they would be willing to participate in the research study about leadership and organizational change. Only two of the original five individuals provided by the key informant were willing to share their experiences. These individuals were contacted via phone (Appendix A) and via email (Appendix B). During the interview (Appendix C), I requested additional names of others mid-level leaders who were directly impacted by the organizational change. Interviewing participants with a similar experience ensured the analysis of similar experiences forged a common understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

At the end of each interview, I also requested each mid-level leader to provide me with three followers to create a second set of participants to be studied. This second set was a purposive sample made up of (a) individual followers of a leader, (b) people who had worked with their leader during the organizational change under investigation, and (c) individuals who were involved with the leader and had insights of what the leader had gone through during the organizational change.

Using this approach allowed me to gain insights about the leader from the followers' perspectives to understand organizational-change lived experiences from both the leaders' and their followers' perspectives. The use of this multilevel approach provided a richer set of data and allowed for the development of a holistic perspective of how organizational change affected leaders, followers, and their relationships. This process of finding mid-level participants and their followers continued until I had sufficient information to reach saturation.

The authenticity, privacy, and safety of study participants were paramount during every step of this study. As such, the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice required of scholarly discovery guided me to ensure that my subjective efforts provided trustworthiness of the process throughout every aspect of the study (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978).

Participants received verbally and in writing an explanation of the scope of the project and a document of what options were available to them should they ever feel harmed by or wanted to be excluded from the research process, which they each acknowledged by signature (Appendix E). The document described the rights of each participant, stated the research was voluntary, and stipulated that the participant could stop involvement without any harm at any point in the process (Appendix E). In order to safeguard individuals and their data, all data were kept in an encrypted and locked environment, as required by the university.

In order to protect and minimize risk to participants, all participant information was anonymized by coding it with a pseudo name and pseudo gender at the start of the research project (Kaiser, 2009; Sieber, 1992). All signed forms were stored in a locked and secure environment since it was the only item that could identify any individual as a study participant.

At the time of each interview, each participant was informed in writing and verbally what their participation in the study would require and outlined the time needed on their part to engage in interviews, review the transcribed text of the interviews, potentially review themes, and for follower typology acknowledgment, referred to as member checking. This process provided a way for each participant to review and validate captured data and their lived experience as presented in the report.

Participant Descriptions

A total of 27 individuals were contacted by phone, email, or in-person. Of those individuals, 17 agreed to participate the study. The other 10 individuals did not choose to participate for the following reasons: five participants did not respond to the invitation despite multiple attempts to contact them via phone or email. Three were excluded from the study because of the non-response of their leader, and two replied via emails that they did not wish to participate in the study.

The participants who agreed to participate were made up of two samples. The first sample included five leaders composed of three males and two females, and the second sample included the 12 followers (Figure 8). They varied in tenure with their respective organizations, ranging from 15 to 38 years for leaders, and 1.5 to 19 years for their followers at the time of the interviews. The leaders averaged 6.8 years in their current position, and followers averaged 6 years in working with their prospective leaders. All leaders expressed experience leading some organizational change within their current organization and before the current organizational change under investigation, whereas 75% of followers expressed being part of an organizational change before this study.

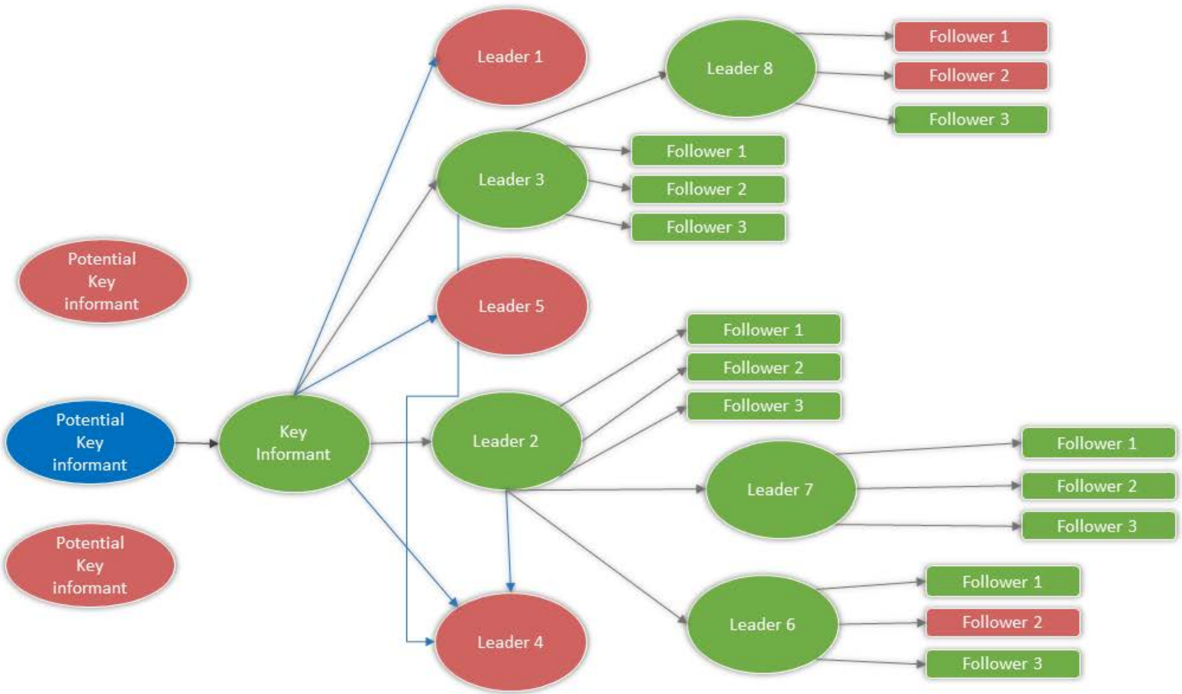

Figure 8. Visual representation of study participants.

Data Collection

The data collection occurred over an 11-month period between March 2016 and February 2017. The site location was two higher education institutions located in the southwestern United States. Three methods of data collection used for this study were (a) interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) document analysis. The primary data collection method for this study occurred through semi-structured interviews in order to gain insights into lived experiences of leaders of organizational change and their followers, which have been found to be an effective technique for collecting data for phenomenological research (Van den Berg, 2005).

Interview Protocol

Primary data collection in phenomenology is accomplished via in-depth interviews (Klenke, 2008). Once potential participants were identified by either the key informant or a participant leader, they were asked via phone or email (recruitment scripts) to sit for interviews.

I had semi-structured interview questions with prompts to aid in guiding discussions about their experience with the phenomenon (Appendix C and Appendix D). The wording remained flexible to allow for interactive discussions of experience with each respondent so I could pursue the area of interest yet allow participants to introduce issues that I had not considered before the interview (Merriam, 1998).

Interviews with both types of participant leaders and their respective followers were conducted in-person. Each interview was scheduled to last approximately 45-60 minutes. Times and locations were selected based on the convenience and availability of the participants.

All interviews were audio recorded in digital format for later transcription and analysis, which allowed me to capture the exact wording used by participants. All interviewee names and data were coded with a pseudonym and pseudo gender to ensure confidentiality. Interview times and dates with each participant were determined through either email request or phone contact (Appendix A and Appendix B). Interviews with leader participants ranged in time from 38 minutes to 55 minutes. The interviews with their associated followers ranged between 35 minutes and 60 minutes in length. Each of the interviews was based on semi-structured questions pertaining to the type of role each played (leader or follower).

All interviews with leaders were conducted at the participants' office, while 9 of 12 followers preferred to meet at a location separate from their home office location but at the research site. This gave the participants a sense of anonymity and security, allowing them to be able to speak freely on topics related to organizational change, leaders, and their views on their experiences.

The semi-structured interviews began with two broad questions (Moustakas, 1994): "What have you experienced regarding leading during organizational change?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of organizational change?" Subsequent questions were asked to gain specific information on how leading during organizational change had altered their view of leadership and or leading of change in higher education. I focused on listening carefully and probing areas that were discussed in order to gain a clear understanding of the subject. Subsequent questions were asked for clarification or elaboration based on the information the participant was sharing. Other questions were asked in relation to general background information. Examples included the length of time at the organization and types of experiences with leading organizational change. Other questions were purposive, specifically about other mid-level leaders who had led organizational change and the individual leaders' followers. A few example questions were: "How would you describe your working relationship with your followers/subordinates?" and "Is there anything else you'd like to discuss as it relates to the merger with the other organization?"

The use of open-ended and semi-structured interviews allowed for rich data collection during the interview process. This was my primary method of data collection, and it is a widely accepted practice in phenomenology inquiries (Creswell, 2012; Klenke, 2008).

I conducted open-ended and semi-structured interviews when interviewing follower participants. There was a series of questions used to identify the follower based on Kelley's (1992) typology. I used Kelley's work on followership to analyze follower types using a modified version of his followership questionnaire.

Some of the questions were related to the self-perceptions of followers concerning their leader—for example, "How do you view yourself as a follower/subordinate?" I also used follow-up questions with brief descriptions based on Kelley's (1992) follower typology, which describes each follower type. Examples of this were (a) “Do you think for yourself and champion new ideas?” (b) “Do you understand your leader’s needs and constraints?” (c) “Do you try to help your leader solve tough problems?” and (d) “Are you more likely to wait until someone provides you direction?” These questions were used to analyze follower types prior to merger and were repeated based on how follower participants described their experiences during the merger.

Once interviews were completed and transcribed by myself, participants were given an electronic version of their transcribed interviews and were asked to review and validate them for accuracy. They were also asked to clarify any discrepancies in what was transcribed and to provide any further information that may have resurfaced based on their review of the transcribed interview document. One of the participants provided feedback as well as additional information, six of the participants replied that the transcription accurately captured their thoughts and offered no changes, and 11 others did not reply to the email requests.

Field Notes

I created a field note journal that I used to record notes and observations during the interviews to capture or highlight topics discussed by each leader interviewee and participant follower interviewee. These notes were both descriptive of office surroundings and environment and were reflective to capture ideas, thoughts, or concerns about each interview. I then transcribed my thoughts from each of the notes after the interview as soon as possible. This allowed me to gain insights from the conversation of the phenomenon in question and to reflect on each interview and have a deeper understanding of what and how the participant lived their experience.

Document Analysis

Secondary data collection included documents and other artifacts gathered from participants. These consisted of email communications, meeting notes taken by participants during the organizational change, and information shared by the university about the organizational change. This secondary data also included my field notes and observations and analytical memos that were based on reviews of meetings and discussions shared by participants (Klenke, 2008). One document included a diagram provided by one of the participants to aid in describing how the participant viewed the effects of organizational change (see Appendix F).

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Gradamer (1989), there are many ways of interpreting phenomenological data. One agreed-upon approach for novice phenomenological researchers is Moustakas' (1994) five-step procedure for analyzing phenomenological data (Creswell, 2012; Klenke, 2008). Moustakas' (1994) approach uses the following steps, as described by Klenke (2008):

- Achieving epoche, or bracketing.
- Achieving horizontalization.
- Clustering means of units and themes.
- Developing textural and structural descriptions.
- Identifying the essence of the experience.

The data analysis process began before the first interview took place, and I followed the steps outlined above in trying to achieve epoche. I did this before the first interview to set aside any assumptions and notions that I may have had about leading organizational change.

The first step toward achieving epoche is suspending predetermined judgments through the practice of bracketing (Klenke, 2008; Moustakas, 1994). Before beginning any interviews, I analyzed through thoughtful examination and reflected on my past experiences with leading organizational change. I wrote about my past and my thoughts by going back and reflecting on my professional history of working in higher education for more than 20 years. I set these thoughts down in a journal that allowed me to go back and reference as needed to gain an understanding of how this might influence myself in interpretation of the data (Giorgi, 1997). In doing so, I wished to reach epoche, which is defined as the process where the researcher identifies and removes their own presuppositions about the phenomenon. This journaling of my thoughts was an endeavor allowing me to understand myself in order to set aside what I may know about the subject in question to understand the phenomenon for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). This process then allowed me to view the phenomenon from the participants' life experiences and allowed for their views to be the focal point of the analysis. I hoped that by achieving the ability to bracket my own presuppositions, I could then focus solely on the research topics and questions and set aside everything else (Moustakas, 1994).

After transcription of all interviews, I reread the transcribed text multiple times. As part of an iterative process, I reflected on the transcribed text by continually examining it within the context of the organizational change as I reviewed the dialogue of each interview, reading each transcription from start to finish. I then questioned what the data were describing concerning each interviewee's experience, making notes of salient points or ideas.

I reread the text of each interview to develop a structural understanding of the data during each interaction. I used examples by Saldana (2009), which provides researchers with a detailed description of coding processes used in qualitative research. I used two methods in coding the data based on Saldana examples of appropriate coding for phenomenological studies: initial coding and theming data. Using different methods allowed me to have different views of the data.

Using Saldana (2009) as a reference on how to do initial coding, I coded during the multiple readings of the transcribed interviews. I used Microsoft Word software to make comments on interesting ideas as well as comments on points of interest described by each participant. I did this to get intimate with the data, doing so at the behest of my chair and a qualitative member of my committee. Their view of not using qualitative data analysis software as the correct approach is shared by phenomenological researchers such as Van Manen. According to Van Manen (2014), "The use of qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) is not the ways of doing phenomenological research" (p. 319).

Next, I went back repeatedly to make sure that I set aside any preconceived notions of my own experiences and that I captured the participants' lived experience. This allowed me to discover the lived experiences of the leaders and their followers based on their views and words describing the phenomenon. Finally, I sought to tie the experiences of each participant into meaningful units related to the data.

In order to do this, as part of the analytic process, I extracted specific statements that were given the same value or equal weight, called *horizontalization* (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). These extracted statements (horizontalization) of the data gathered from interviews provided information about each participants' lived experiences (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). I took these statements and placed them in a Microsoft Excel document for each participant leader and follower, adding each field note and related question based on each participant. Once I completed this process, I used a second coding approach based on examples from Saldana (2009), referred to as theming data, to extract both manifest and latent themes. I did this by asking the following two questions: "What does it mean to be a mid-level leader of organizational change?" and "What is the experience to be a mid-level leader during organizational change?"

According to Saldana (2009), using this thematic analysis technique provides the researcher with a way to identify and highlight significant statements, sentences, and quotes, which then allows for an understanding of the phenomenon in question. The application of these methods during the study allowed for the qualities of human experience to be evident by directly naming each of the experiences.

The final step required me to reflect about the categories as they evolved while continuing to examine them for other alternative understandings of the experiences. This was done before categorizing them into emerging thematic units used to write the textual (what) and structural (how) descriptive text (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2012) suggested researchers use different approaches in examination of information to guide reflection to ensure a researcher captures the meaning of the lived experience. Through this iterative cycle of review and data analysis, I hoped to uncover how mid-level leaders and their followers experienced organizational change.

Trustworthiness Credibility and Reliability

In considering trustworthiness or rigor of qualitative data, one looks at various strategies to help maximize potential in meaning-making that is required in both qualitative and leadership research (Klenke, 2008). *Trustworthiness* as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is comparable to the quantitative view of validity and reliability. Their definition included credibility, dependability, and transferability of qualitative research. Creditability, like internal validity in quantitative research methodology, is the "extent to which results are credible or believable from the participants' standpoint" (Klenke, 2008, p. 38). The following approaches were used to ensure credible data were collected from the participants' viewpoints

First, information gathered from all interviews were transcribed and provided to participants to review and correct if appropriate. This member checking of interview transcriptions, themes, and thick descriptions were made available for review by participants to ensure the descriptions captured the participants' lived experiences, lending to the study's credibility (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Four of the leaders provided feedback on the transcribed text, while eight individuals provided feedback on their review of the themes and descriptions.

Second, to aid in the credibility of the study, I interviewed multiple leaders and their followers to gain a multi-voice and multi-perspective of the lived experience of the participants. The use of a wide range of informants allowed for a holistic view point, where participants’ experiences were used to aid in exhibiting characteristics of similarity, dissimilarity, redundancy, and variety in the data. In doing so, I gained a greater set of knowledge from a wider group of individuals, allowing for a universal understanding of the phenomena that may be experienced by a greater population (Shenton, 2004).

Third, familiarity with the organization via prolonged engagement during the data collection and in the field with participants aided in credibility of analysis. The adequate time allowed for a deeper understanding of the higher education institutional context. In interviewing different individuals throughout an 11-month period, I was able to work through misunderstandings and ambiguity, allowing me to build trust with research participants. My research plan included beginning my engagement with organization members in the spring of 2016 and extending it through the winter of 2017 to gain an understanding of participants’ roles in leading organizational change within the organizations.

To combat research bias due to me being the primary instrument in data collection in a qualitative study, I practiced bracketing as part of a phenomenological study before beginning the study to ensure the focus was on the informants and their experiences. I returned to my initial thoughts on leadership and organizational change to ensure that I was focused on the participant’s view of their lived experience. I also focused on what Klenke (2008) stated when conducting phenomenological analysis: “One must continue to maintain a constantly questioning attitude in search for misunderstandings, incomplete understandings, and make explicit the shared world between the researcher and the researched" (p. 232).

To improve credibility, peer examination was conducted during the data collection and analysis process. I continually met with my faculty advisor, who has years of experience in qualitative analysis and who provided a secondary review of data as it was modified into thematic units of understanding to double-check my interpretation, which contributed to both the rigor and credibility of this study (Klenke, 2008; Shenton, 2004).

I met with my faculty advisor and with committee members to conduct faculty debriefing multiple times during the research process, thus contributing to the honesty of the research process (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Shenton, 2004). These peer debriefings were conducted over the course of the study, from March 2016 through December 2017, via a series of meetings with faculty members to discuss alternative approaches and develop ideas and interpretations to help me recognize any biases or preferences in order to ensure the credibility of the analysis.

Credibility is the internal validity in quantitative research methodology. It is the "extent to which results are credible or believable from the participants' standpoint" (Klenke, 2008, p. 38). In order to ensure that credible data were collected from the participants' viewpoints, I engaged in member checking of interview transcriptions, notes, themes, and thick descriptions. They were reviewed by participants to ensure descriptions captured the participants' lived experiences, thus lending to the study's credibility (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994).

I did this by providing copies of the transcribed interviews to the participants for review and modification if necessary; this "validity check" was to "ensure the essence of interview was captured" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 51). Three participants acknowledged that their responses matched their experiences, and one of the participants offered additional comments and text that had not been shared during the interview. A total of four participants—two leaders and two followers—provided feedback on the insights obtained from the data, including clusters of meaning and themes. This ensured I had captured the participants' experiences, which also lent credibility to the study (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994).

In order to triangulate information, I gathered data from multiple sources to strengthen both the credibility and dependability of the findings (Creswell, 2012; Klenke, 2008; Merriam, 1998). As mentioned above, these data sources included interviews, research journals, and documents the participants provided. In interviewing various leaders with multiple followers, an additional data source could be used for triangulation, and these multiple perspectives and experiences, which were verified against each other, provided a rich picture constructed from different points of view. Van Maanen (1983) described this process as the exploitation of opportunities, whereby a researcher inspects bits of information from various sources to construct a homogenous picture.

Dependability in a quantitative paradigm refers to the reliability of the study, or how well the results can be replicated (Klenke, 2008). In the qualitative approach, dependability means “the degree in which the results is consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221).

To enhance dependability, the researcher created an audit trail that provided detail on how the research process was followed. The audit trail consists of raw data, analysis, process notes, and preliminary information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In doing so, I provided information on the research design, its implementation, how data were gathered in the field, and a reflective review of the project to determine what was most effective in the research process.

Transferability is similar to external validity in quantitative research; it means the extent to which results can be transferred to another setting (Klenke, 2008). Shenton (2004) stated that “findings of a qualitative project is specific to a particular environment and small number individuals, therefore, making it impossible to transfer findings and conclusions to other situations and populations” (p. 69). Transferability is then up to the practitioner when reviewing this document to examine if the situation is similar to what is described in a qualitative study (Bassey, 1981). Therefore, it is my responsibility as a researcher to provide sufficient contextual information about the case and site to enable the reader to make it transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Once I completed the iterative process of (a) data collection, (b) transcription, (c) transcription review and member check, (d) data coding, and (e) analysis of each interview, I combined them into a composite whole in an Excel spreadsheet. I created two documents, one for leaders and another for followers. In doing so, I systematically made decisions based on having become intimate in my understanding of the data collected. I then began my data extraction to gain from this review an understanding of what Moustakas (1994) described as the clustering means of units and themes. I then began writing the textural and structural descriptions of each individual participant, first by memoing ideas of the data interpretation of what the participants' lived experiences described in their interviews and subsequent dialogues with me the researcher. I finally began writing what is presented in Chapter IV, the findings of the composite whole shared by leaders via the commonalities of themes that are expressed.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This study explored the experiences of mid-level leaders, their followers, and their relationships during organizational change. There was a void in previous research literature in explaining the phenomenon of leadership during organizational change as lived by mid-level leaders and their followers. The lack of insight into this phenomenon is what interested me in investigating the mid-level leader and follower perspectives and the interactions between the two. Studying how leaders and their respective followers perceived their experiences of leadership during organizational change reveals how each is affected by organizational change.

A qualitative framework was used in this study, specifically phenomenological research methods in the collection of data and interpretation to present information in this report. The results are therefore a blended view of experiences and shared perspectives of leaders and followers' lived experiences. The phenomenological study was based on the following research questions:

1. How do mid-level leaders in higher education describe their experiences during organizational change?
2. How do leaders' self-perception of their leadership roles change based on their experiences during organizational change?
3. What are followers' perceptions of their leaders' role in organizational change?

4. How has a leader's role in leading organizational change altered the leader-follower working relationship?

This chapter presents the findings that evolved from the lived experiences of 17 leader and follower participants from two public southwestern universities during their time of a university merger. In doing so, I met with individuals who had very recently (within previous year) gone through the organizational modifications and who were still in the midst of the merger, allowing the data collected to be reasonably close to or in situ of the actual event.

I herein present the findings in a manner consistent with a phenomenological study. I first provide the reader with a vignette of each the participants; this brief background is of both types of participants—leaders and their followers. Next, I provide the overall thick description of their combined lived experiences expressed within themes, and, finally, I use those themes and experiences to answer the research questions.

Participant Narratives

The use of a qualitative approach allowed me to participate with individuals as I investigated the phenomenon of leading during organizational change. I gained an understanding of how this event was viewed by both leaders and their followers through their stories. I was able to find individuals who could speak of their lived experiences concerning leadership during organizational change.

Leaders

To gain a sense of both leaders and what organizational change meant to them before the organizational change formed the foundation of this study. I asked leaders to provide me with a brief background of their tenure with the organization as well prior experience with leading organizational change. I did this by asking the following three questions to each leader:

1. How long have you worked with your current organization?
2. What have you experienced regarding leading organizational change?
3. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of leading organizational change?

The following vignettes of each leader participant are presented to help the reader understand the essence of their views before the organizational change under study. The vignettes below are from both the leaders and their respective followers' lived experiences.

Bob is an individual who has more than 20 years of experience in a higher education setting; having progressed through various levels of the organization, he has a unique view of organizational life. He has experience in leading change and described some of them as being anywhere from small, day-to-day operational processes to large transformational ones with organizational-wide impact. Bob views his relationship with his followers as strong but responded, "You'd have to ask them," when asked about how they view their working relationship. Bob stated he values open communication with his staff as to what he is allowed to discuss. When asked about prior experiences with organizational change, he considered how he has led individuals with differing views, from excitement to resistance of change. Bob reflected that in his past there were varieties of forms of resistance, from individuals who openly opposed the change but ultimately did, to others who were not going to adapt. Bob stated that he understands that sometimes it takes a collaborative approach to dealing with individuals who are resistant to organizational change as decided by the leadership. In his view, there are ways to work with, and if needed, overcome these individuals. He stated, “Sometimes, it’s been okay. That person is not going to [be] cooperative, so we’re going to work around that person, or that person’s not being cooperative and therefore needing to get somebody else to help them be more cooperative.”

Bob provided insight into how, in his prior experience of organizational change, a leader may not have to lead individuals to embrace the change or move forward but may have another leader or colleague aid in overcoming the individual’s resistance to organizational change. Bob’s prior experiences with organizational change influenced his perceptions and views of resistance to organizational change. This previous experience affected how he sees moving organizational change forward and how he determines which subordinates to rely on to aid him in driving organizational change efforts forward. In Bob’s case, he is a leader who is very matter of fact with his approach to behaviors of individuals during organizational change, such as his approach to resistance to change. It is one of the first things he expressed about his prior experiences, using it to identify his views on leadership and his responsibilities to the organization, which, as a leader during a change, is to ensure that the organization moves forward.

That colors his views about resistant individuals, who are then seen as just another obstacle to overcome as part of leading during organizational change.

During this current organizational change, Bob viewed his role from a multitude of perspectives. First, he was a leader of an individual unit who was responsible for making sure it moved forward during the organizational change. In addition, he was an individual leader working with a collaborative set of leaders who as a whole were entrusted with the responsibility of overall leadership to move the whole organization forward. Bob's role is not unique; some mid-level leaders have to make sense of the differing roles they play during the organization change, the first role one of direct responsibility and another role where leading is part of shared leadership point of view.

Francis has worked at the institution in various positions for more than 25 years. During her tenure, she has worked at multiple levels at the university with a different set of executive leaders. In looking inward, she views herself as a person who wants to know why things are occurring. She proceeds with organizational change with great hesitation and believes that organizations must have plans when implementing change. She understands that executive leadership has to deal with the strategic direction of the institution and make, in her words, "those type of decisions." Francis believes her role was critical to the success of organizational change efforts. Francis described her experiences with prior organizational changes as small organizational process modifications sometimes confined to one area of the university. In her view, previous organizational changes were based on the context of a business process, adjustments due to policy, or individual process changes that, while they did affect multiple individuals, were not organization-wide. Francis explained that a substantial prior organizational change in her career influenced how she worked and managed with her unit during the current specific organizational change. Francis's past experiences have helped her determine her views of herself as a leader as well as her view of appropriate activities related to leadership during organizational change.

Francis describes her views of organizational change as a multi-step approach: first, a leader must make sense of the modification, then come to terms with the change, and be ready to lead the organizational changes effort for her followers. She described her experience in the following way:

> When you are leading change, I think you are somewhat dealing with your own self and kind of getting around how well do you deal with [organizational] change. Then you are thinking about the other individuals whom you are responsible for, in the sense of you are the leader [of these individuals]. And so setting the tone and the direction in making sure that there is good communication throughout the [organizational change] process.

In Francis' view, organizational change that is originated by a leader is easier to manage and accept than one that is ordered by others, even from within the organization. She views these types of organizational changes and the approach to complete them as leadership based on one's formal position responsibility. Francis views leadership during organizational change as part of her professional responsibility—to lead her part of the organizational change effort and figure out how to get behind it even if she does not agree or understand the vision or overall reason for the organizational change.

Franklin has a unique background that led him to a leadership role in the university. He had been in his current position for 5 years before the organizational change. Franklin has worked for the organization for more than 28 years, having served multiple roles in the smaller of the two organizations. His background in leading change is based on operational modifications, including changes that involve training and education components affecting various units across the institution.

Franklin stated that there were a few external forces in the preceding months before the organizational change, including various organizational evaluations as well as other organizational changes at Organization B that had taken place prior to the most recent organizational change. He specifically mentioned one where he led the effort to modify business processes affecting the whole organization into a standard set of procedures. Also, during this time, he viewed his role as a change leader whose job was trying to provide information to individuals whose work life was modified because of the organizational change. He stated: “There were individuals who apparently were quite concerned about the changes, so I needed to relay information to them. So that was actually a very busy time for me in terms of affecting change.”

Before the organizational change, he had authority and power to enact organizational changes at the institution. Due to his leadership position, he worked in a collaborative team with multiple individuals from across both organizations to discuss and propose the organizational change that is the focus of this study.

Barbara has been in the institution for 15 years and in her current role for 4 years. She has had various experiences over the last decade. In her view, there has been a significant change in the organization. In her prior experiences of previous significant organizational changes as both follower and a leader, she viewed the disruptions as difficult, and she attributes that to her perception of the organizational culture, which she believes values traditional methods of doing things, and she believes that people morph back into these “old” ways to get things done when it comes to day-to-day operational processes. In discussing a prior experience with substantial organizational change, she recalled how resistance played a crucial role in determining the outcome. She viewed previous experiences with organizational change as learning experiences:

> I learned from it in that I went into it a little more cautiously, reluctantly maybe, as far as how I needed to approach the situation. When it came to the [organizational change], I think I was aware of the extent to which people’s feelings [would] get hurt. To which a lot adjustment has to made. To which communication is so vital.

Barbara’s prior experiences with organizational change influenced her views of leading during organizational change. Even though those previous organizational changes and challenges took place while she was a follower, she stated that they guided her in modifying her activities and behaviors as a leader in dealing with individuals during the organizational change. It caused her to take a more cautious and reluctant approach to organizational change. These prior experiences influenced her perceptions and her approach in dealing with individuals, especially in interacting with people:

> I think that experience of that first major change made [me make] some of that adjusting a little easier because we knew how we needed to approach some of these folks that we were bringing into it [the organizational change].

Barbara viewed her prior experiences with organizational change as keys to aid in understanding how those impacted by that change may perceive it; in the current change, she tried to ensure that she had activities to combat these individuals’ resistance.

She viewed organizational change as a constant and examines each one of the modification’s areas she continually changes. She expressed frustration with the ongoing changes and with the organization's lack of understanding and failure of communication from executive leadership. Barbara struggled to see why the organizational changes are required or the reasoning associated with the organizational change.

James has worked at the institution for more than 30 years, and he believes his service to the organization has given him in-depth insights into deciphering how executive leadership decisions and power and authority ebb and flow. James stated that his long experience and various roles provide him with the ability to sense in what strategic direction executive leaders will want to move the institution. James believes his experience in prior organizational changes has allowed him to discern who will be the "dominant coalition" that is moving the organization forward.

> I see a very important piece of leadership, which is an intuitive sense of organization and organizational model: the discernment of the dominant coalition. I think that in [this] sense, my experience over [my career] and years [in leadership] have led to some sense of determining the validity, urgency, and degree of importance of some of the change processes.

James reflected on how the current organizational change seemed strange to him because of his prior experiences with varied organizational change processes; he stated that he has seen them reverse themselves based on different executive leadership. When discussing his views on how those prior experiences influence his perceptions of organizational change, he stated that due to his role and experience, he can see and understand what the shortcomings of the organizational change in question are.

Followers

The second group studied were followers of individuals who lead organizational change. These individual followers' perceptions of the organizational change and of their leader were based on a series of questions that aided in understanding the essence of what they experienced during the change. These questions allowed me to understand how followers viewed their relationship with their leader and to understand if the followers perceived that their leaders had changed because of their leaders' roles during the organizational change. This approach yielded critical insights on how the leader leads during organizational change, how leading organizational change may affect the relationship of many followers to their leader, and how followers see their leader. Another part of this analysis was to discover if their follower type, based on Kelley's followership model, made a difference in their views of their leader and their particular relationship.

To gain a sense of how followers and their relationship with their leaders may have been affected by the organizational change, I asked followers to provide me with a brief background of their view of their relationship with their leader and of how they view themselves as a follower and to describe their tenure with their leader. In doing so, it allowed me to understand how their background, their view of themselves, and their relationship with their leader may have been affected during the organizational change. I did this by asking each follower the following questions regarding their relationship with the leader.

1. How long have you worked with your leader?
2. How would you describe your working relationship with your leader/manager?
3. How would you describe yourself as an employee?

Based on each follower's answers to the third question, I determined the follower type and the relationship with his or her specific leader. Each follower was categorized into one of the following types—exemplary, conformist, aligned, pragmatist, passive follower—using Kelley's (1992) follower typology. The following vignettes of each follower are presented to help the reader understand the essence of their views of themselves and their leaders before the organizational change under study.

Grace has worked for the organization for more than 20 years and has worked with her leader for 3 years. When describing her working relationship with her leader, she described the leader as someone who is calm in any circumstance and sets the example with his outward demeanor. She viewed her leader as an individual who is kind and treats all with respect and dignity. Having worked with him in different roles, she has seen this in all leadership roles he has been in; he is seen as someone in charge, but he does it in a dignified manner—he is respectful of all and of their opinions.

Grace views herself as an individual who can quickly and easily adapt to change and sees her role of a follower as crucial to fulfilling the mission of the organization. She sees herself as someone who understands her role as a follower:

> Well, I think I support the institutional mission to the best of my abilities. I think that there is an importance in being a follower, in that you can't express every thought you have, and it can't be put out there.

Grace views this from the sense of appropriateness of when and how someone discusses issues at hand. As a follower, she sees herself as someone who is not afraid to provide her opinions to her leader, and she sees it as part of her role as a follower:

> I think there is a place for confidentiality, for respecting the views of the leader, and that we are each in our role because of where we are. I respect the fact that

> he is my supervisor, my boss, and that I am going to the best of my ability follow his direction.

In reviewing Grace's answers and her relationship with her leader, it seems that she is an exemplary follower according to Kelley's typology; she saw herself as an individual who keeps things in perspective but also as a follower who understood the overall goals of the organization and was dedicated to aiding her leader in achieving them.

Susan has worked for the organization for 11 years. She viewed the organizational change experience as severe because she was not able to present her views and opinions related to organizational changes in her area. She believed that her insights would have been helpful into the organization moving forward during the organizational change. Susan expressed a sense that she had lost a certain amount of influence and voice in helping inform decisions; she stated these perceptions and her difficulty with the organizational change:

> [The organizational change was] very difficult 'cause sometimes ... because it was hard to ... I was unable to stand up and say things [I have learned] with my time and history with the [Organization B] and my experience [working in this organization] as an expert in that area.

Having worked for Organization B, she had issues with the organizational change in that she sensed concern about the modification going on around her. Susan's perspective of the organizational change was then complicated by the fact that she perceived she had multiple leaders. This view led to her sense of instability during organizational change. She expressed her frustrations when she sought to gain an understanding of some stability within her organization. She mentioned that because of this, her leader and she felt that she had a unique view of the organizational change.

She believed that her experiences during organizational change modified her perception of the organization. Susan expressed that she believes that her organization lacks leadership, organizational stability, and appropriate communication. Susan explained that stability within organization life was vital to her emotional state. During the organizational change, she stated, “I began to distrust my leadership.” She observed that as more changes proceeded, she felt that her leader did not look out for them as followers. She commented that she believes her leader was inadequate and was unable to do anything to aid in the direction and impact that the organizational change had on the individuals who were being directly affected by decisions of the change:

> Throughout the whole merger, there was ... there is a lot of uncertainty anyway on what is going to happen. And sometimes it was ... sometimes you lost a little bit of trust in people that you were working for because sometimes I did not really feel like they had your back or something like that, or were not always available to go to, or were not able to solve an issue in a timely fashion.

Susan’s constant sense of uncertainty about her role and the organizational change in general and what she viewed as a lack of leadership support led to her being an alienated follower, using Kelley’s typology, yet some of the concern was due to the constant modification.

Susan expressed a sense of hurt as well as a sense of helplessness in describing what happened during the organizational change—that her voice was not heard and that, in her view, her leader did not value her input or provide guidance on particular decisions that needed to be made during the organizational change:

> It [the organizational change was] kind of almost, with not ... It is not that people [leaders] did not care, but it is almost like they [leaders] did not care. When you take it to [leaders], and then they do not really react on [your questions] and then [the followers] are still getting asked how to do something, [they] can’t really

> respond, because [they don't] feel like [they were] the person of authority to give the final answer.

Henry has worked for Organization A for 16 years and with his leader for 8 years. In discussing their relationship, Henry described it as a complicated one built over time that has resulted in familiarity with his leader's tendencies. Henry ascribed this to working together on various projects and organizational changes over many years. In describing the leader-follower dynamic, Henry sees himself as a person who has the trust of his leader and believes that his leader views him as a go-to person. He is an individual whom his leader trusts and frequently shares issues with him and requests advice on operational process within his unit. He stated that he and his leader regularly discuss problems and issues and have frank conversations. In these discussions, Henry noted that he served as a sounding board for his leader about possible directions for their unit and the leader was willing to receive constructive feedback on his ideas. Henry attributed the frankness to how long they have worked together and a sense of understanding between them of the role they each play in their leader-follower relationship. He elaborated further:

> I don't know if this explains it, but I provide my ideas, we can have a discussion, we cannot agree on it, but then we can walk away and go to dinner and get along just great and not think about it. Come back in the next day and pick up on the same heated discussion that we had about an item. Depends on what the change is. I was involved in the decision on how we separated out and what areas I gave up and what areas I kept, whenever we changed everything. We sat down with sticky notes for 4 hours and figured out who was going to do what, who was going to go where and how reporting would change and how that would affect me and how I would feel if I couldn't do my job. So, we created areas based on how they work together.

Their relationship lends itself to an approach where the follower is a trusted partner with his leader as well as someone who is not afraid to challenge the leader's direction when necessary. Henry stated, "I like to think for myself, and I like to provide my input, but if I'm overruled, then I guess I'll just go with it, as long as I feel like I've been heard."

Based on information provided during the interview sessions, Henry fits Kelley's (1992) exemplary follower type. This individual is trusted and is not afraid to challenge his leadership, based on an issue at hand, and can be both critical of the leader's decisions while at the same time being a sounding board for his leader. Like all exemplary followers, Henry is a trusted individual who can get things done and provide advice to the leader when needed.

Matthew has worked at the organization for more than 10 years, and although he worked indirectly with his leader during that time, he has had a direct working relationship only for the last 1.5 years.

In response to being asked to describe his relationship with his leader/supervisor, he responded that his leader provides him with the resources required to move the organization forward. He described their relationship from a transactional viewpoint, where support was provided in the form of specific resources that were approved by his leader.

> All the things that we need to get done in [SSS], we are able to get the support that we would need, like adding positions, and that type of support are key from the leader. And we have been able to do that, both with [my leader] in the past and other types of support when it's needed.

Matthew described his experience during the organizational change based on his formal job role, and his description was focused on the ability to complete tasks and the amount of effort needed to be a productive follower. While Matthew understood that there were some forms of resistance to the organizational change, he did not view these as issues that were his responsibility to address and considered those the responsibilities of his leader and his peers.

When asked to describe how his role with his leader was affected by the organizational change, Matthew viewed himself as a pragmatic follower; he understood that he had a set of activities that he must accomplish during the organizational change to be successful. While he was aware of issues that individuals faced within Organization B, he stated, “Those were not my concerns and were really others in the organization issues to handle.” While engaged in his activities, Matthew was more willing to look around and adapt his followership style as warranted based on the situation at hand—being an exemplary sometimes, being passive based on decision processes, and being alienated if there were decisions he did not believe were needed. Discussions with Matthew revealed that in his opinion there should have been more discussion about significant decisions, especially on what input he provided during the organizational change.

Barbara has worked with her leader for 4.5 years and with the organization for 12 years. She considers her current role to have a duality of purpose similar to other followers interviewed; she serves as both leader and follower. In describing her relationship with her leader, she stated it was “purely a professional one.” Barbara expressed this professional relationship in the following way: “I don’t know. I wouldn’t say we had much of a relationship. I mean, we speak purely as needed and we don’t communicate that often. Mostly through emails, regular meetings.”

Barbara talked about how she views herself as a follower and described herself in terms that would categorize her as a pragmatic follower—in Kelley’s (1992) typology—who, as she iterates, takes care of things:

> I try to anticipate needs, and I think part of where I see my role is making sure I don’t have to have that regular, or frequent, interaction with my leader. I just sort of handle things as part of my organization and ensure that they don’t escalate to that level, and then handle whatever things he hands back to me that need to be done as efficiently and effectively as possible.

When asked to explain how Barbara viewed her relationship with her leader specifically during the organizational change, she again described it as “a professional one.” Barbara viewed herself as a subordinate and considered her relationship with her leader a formal one. She described herself as an individual who would have to turn to other followers to gain an understanding of how her leader functioned. For example, she noted that early in her career working under this leader, aware that others had longer-lasting and more profound relationships with the leader than she did, she often turned to them for guidance in dealing with him as his subordinate. Barbara went on to describe her leader by examples, mostly by pointing out his leadership shortcomings, and she was highly critical of his leadership abilities and approaches. Based on Kelley’s (1992) followership type, Barbara is an alienated follower; she is a critical thinker, and she has a critical view of her leader. Her statements revealed both how she views herself as a follower and how she views her leader. While situationally these two views can be reconciled with the pragmatic survivor follower type, her view appeared to be more those of an alienated follower during the organizational change.

Nancy has worked for Organization A for a total of 16 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with her leader for 8 years. When asked to describe her relationship with her leader, she stated that it was “built on trust and mutual respect.” Nancy replied that she thinks that there is both formal and informal respect for her leader. She believes that due to the long-standing understanding of how each of them works, she can understand and take on projects provided by her leader. She stated that her leader can communicate what she wants in a project, and if there is ambiguity in a direction, she can discuss it with the leader to gain clarification. Nancy described their relationship in the following way:

> There is a lot of trust, and she permits me a lot of independence and autonomy in what I do as far as how to accomplish the goal. She does the primary goal setting. But how I get there and the steps in between, she gives me a lot of room to determine those myself.

Her description of their relationship signified a sense of trust and respect for her leader based on experiences of working together. It also revealed her relationship with her leader is that of a pragmatic follower, although she discussed how their relationship is built on trust. She used terms like *has allowed* and *needing guidance and direction* when describing how she works with her leader on a day-to-day basis.

Rebecca has worked for Organization A for a total of 11 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with her leader for 4 years. In discussions about her relationship with her leader, Rebecca revealed her leader to be a person with mentorship qualities who was impactful on her early career. She described her leader as someone with a wealth of information and expertise, a person she feels she can go to and can approach.

In her view, she sees her as a resource, a person who can do many things, like tactically manage her day-to-day leadership responsibilities, and is a resource who can answer a variety of questions because of her knowledge and experience within the unit she oversees.

She felt that she has a lot of similarity with her leader and can interact with her freely and openly. She viewed her relationship from a leader-follower viewpoint, where her leader is in charge and leading the unit, but Rebecca believed she can easily anticipate her leader's reactions to various scenarios. Rebecca described how this works:

> I think that our delivery of information to our employees is similar. We're direct, we don't really like to beat around the bush a whole lot. I think that we ... [other followers] and I kind of have this thing, it's like, what would [Francis] do? So [Francis]'s not here, we think like … What would [Francis] do? What would she do in this situation? And I feel like I've worked with her long enough that I do know what she would do in a lot of situations.

When Rebecca was asked to describe how she sees herself as a follower, she described herself as a person who likes to gauge the situation. In Kelley's (1992) followership model, Rebecca's description classified her as a pragmatic follower. According to Kelley, this follower type is one who analyzes the environment and uses whichever follower type is required for the given situation—alienated, conformist, exemplary, pragmatic, or passive. Rebecca described how she fits the pragmatic type when discussing how she deals with a new situation:

> So, I like to kind of take a step back, observe the situation, figure out kind of who's the alpha, who's the ... like, try to size people up … then once I feel

> comfortable, then I don't have a problem saying what I think needs to be done, providing input, that type of stuff.

Rebecca described herself as a follower who is adaptable to the situation at hand and who will not necessarily challenge her leader and will adjust to what needs to be done.

Francis has worked with Organization A for more than 20 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with her leader for 13 years. Francis stated that over time her relationship with her leader has evolved as they have both moved into different positions and served various roles. As she has grown and learned more, she has become a more independent follower. As both a supervisor and a subordinate, she has been able to work with more freedom, but she still can seek guidance when needed from her leader.

They have worked together on multiple projects while each in different positions. In describing her relationship with her leader, Francis stated she believes the relationship has evolved due to both familiarity and longevity of working together in their respective roles. Francis described this as a good working relationship between herself and her supervisor:

> I think there's trust, respect of each other in our perspective roles. I think that having my leader as my direct supervisor for as many years as I have, you get to know a person really well. So, he's going to know my strengths, weaknesses. I know his strengths, his weaknesses. So, when I say a good relationship, I think that we understand each other in some ways to know. ... Like he would know something that I may have to work on, where I don't feel as comfortable, and where I might need to get more guidance or input from him.

When asked to discuss how she sees herself as a follower, Francis revealed that she is aware of the role she plays but has the ability to disagree with her supervisor yet still be respectful and carry out orders if she is told to do so. She wants to understand the overall goal in order to understand the direction of the organization so she can know how she may be able to create tactical activities. Francis exhibits the qualities of a pragmatic follower who, although she often shows concern and can be critical of her leader's decisions, is an independent thinker who completes a given task:

> So, what's the goal? What are we trying to accomplish? Because it might not be that I don't want to do that. I'm not trying to challenge in that way, but I want to understand better. But I think I take it sometimes, as most of the time I can probably figure out why we're doing what we're doing, and so maybe I don't ask the question. And sometimes I take it as I do follow a chain of command, and this is the directive that we've been given. So I'm going to go for it. It doesn't mean that I won't ask questions. It doesn't mean that I might not say, "Well, I disagree with the course that we're taking," but I'm certainly going to abide by what we need to do, and I can make it happen. I can go back, and I can make it happen if this is what we need to do.

Although exhibiting views of an exemplary follower, Francis is also a pragmatic survivor follower who is willing to figure things out quietly and adopt different views depending on the situation, pulling on differing follower characteristics as necessary (Kelley, 1992).

Gale has worked for Organization B for a total of 2 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with her leader for 1 year. Gale was hired as part of the merger, so when asked to discuss her working relationship with her leader, she stated, "I would describe our working relationship as a work in progress." Gale said this view was based on the fact that her leader has been involved in the organizational change project. She viewed this as upending what normally takes place during "regular time" in a work environment. Gale said that both she and her leader were actively working on that relationship and understood that it was odd because of the circumstances based on the changes going on within the organization. In summarizing her situation, she stated that she believes that relationships take time to develop, and her schedule has influenced the relationship with her leader. When pressed about this, Gale said that in conversations with her leader, both understood that this was a work in progress that was affected by the organizational change.

> She said it might take a while to get that same level of trust and associated relationship that people would normally get over time, adding that's what I'm referring to as far as a work in progress, we're still trying to learn one another's [styles].

Gale, due to circumstances and timing, falls into a pragmatic survivor role during the organizational change; she has to adjust to the relationship with her leader and negotiate how her position will work in relation to the organization as well as to fellow employees.

Michael has worked with for Organization B for a total of 7 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with his leader for 3 years. He stated that he has interacted with his leader for several years but did not directly report to him until recently. Although he reports to two supervisors, he sees only one as his leader. He does not see this as an issue, and he described his relationship with his leader as cordial and respectful. In regard to the culture of his unit, he described the work relationship style that his leader employs as a family-based approach. Though the relationship remains professional, he stated that the unique family-based approach influences how he views his leader's style in relation to the relationship dynamics. He discussed the professionalism and mutual respect that is expected, and the leader emphasizes working together and getting the job done. He mentioned that "there is a sense of a family approach" to the working relationship with the leader. Michael believes that James values the whole person, and it is apparent in his leadership style.

Michael considers his relationship with James as open, though everyone knows who is in charge, but Michael feels he can challenge his leader. He provided these comments that illustrate his ability to question his leader's decisions:

> As a follower, as long as we're not crossing any [legal] line, once my boss tells me, this is the way it's going to be, I usually go one more step and say, "Hey, I want to just talk through this one more time." And I might ask him to hear me out. And I might ask him to walk through and make sure I didn't miss anything. But once that's done, I get on board.

Michael's relationship exhibits the traits of an exemplary follower. He has the ability to be both supportive and respectful of his leader's decisions but is not afraid to confront, ask for clarification of language, or critique a leader's decision, which fits Kelley's (1992) exemplary follower model of one who is willing to question and challenge the leader if there is a problem. Michael described his interactions with his leader as a follower who is willing to think things through and is independent in his thinking.

Jake has worked for Organization A for a total of 12 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with his leader during his whole time with the organization. In discussing his relationship with his leader, he described it as open, helpful, and communicative. He had a sense that his leader has helped in shaping him as a follower and helped him grow as an employee. In discussions about their relationship, Jake described it as follows: "It seemed at times like they could anticipate each other's needs." His used the recurring term of *open* in describing their relationship, indicating that he was able to discuss things with his leader. Jake stated that he found it interesting in his dealings with his leader's approach because she made it feel like a family, and he believed others would agree. For instance, his leader is always available to answer questions. In his view, his leader was very involved in the day-to-day operations of the unit, and the leader's openness meant that she was always there to answer any question for followers. In the interview with Jake about his leader-follower relationship, it was apparent Jake is an advocate for his leader and supportive of what his leader does for the organization. Jake stated that when new people are hired to their unit, he reminds them that their leader has done their jobs, has vast experience within their unit, and has an open-door policy.

When asked to discuss how he views himself as a follower, Jake used terms such as *loyal*, *thorough*, and *organized*. Jake spoke of how these qualities work with his relationship with his leader, providing his understanding of when he has the discretion to take the lead and when to ask for direction from the leader:

> I think that we've built that relationship over many years of working together, so I would probably follow Francis anywhere. [chuckle] She really is a good boss in the sense of she expects a lot, but she values her employees. She's very knowledgeable. So, when I can't make a decision on something, I feel like I can go to her and she can help me make the decision and then it makes sense.

Jakes language as well as the manner of how he discussed his leader indicates that he is an exemplary follower. According to Kelley (1992), these followers champion their leader, are extremely loyal, but are willing to challenge their leader up to a point. In his reflection, he pointed out that while he admires his leader in some ways, he also exhibits qualities of a conformist, meaning that he turns to his leader for approval of the decisions he is making, thereby seeking a sense of acknowledgment in judgments from the leader.

Jackie has worked with for the organization for more than 20 years and has had a direct reporting relationship with her leader for 10 years. When discussing her relationship with her leader, she used phrases like *lack of respect*, *lacking leadership abilities*, and *not very likable*. Jackie expressed that she does not believe her leader is a good supervisor, let alone a leader. She described her leader as a person who is single-minded, not open to any discussions or anyone else's ideas, and authoritative. She indicated that theirs was not a horrible relationship, but she just felt that her leader is not a very good leader of people. To illustrate, Jackie described various events where she perceived her leader was very patronizing to her and others when they offered ideas.

Jackie described herself as an individual who is hardworking and does what she is paid for and sometimes tries to go beyond that requirement. As a follower, she stated she would do what she is told regardless of who her supervisor might be. Jackie acknowledged that sometimes she does not like the decision but will do it anyway without commenting on the change. She also described herself as someone who has a problem with change and who is, in fact, resistant, especially if she believes she has no voice in what is occurring. Jackie did not see herself as a bad employee but as a good one who happens to have problems with her leader. Based on Jackie's description of herself as a follower and her relationship with her leader, she is what Kelley (1992) described as an alienated follower. Jackie is a follower who is critical of her leader and will not actively engage in working with her leader, and she demonstrates a little of a pragmatic survivor. Jackie sees herself as adamant in her beliefs about the leader and will only do what she is told since she feels that her leader does not appreciate her as an employee.

Emerging Themes

To reveal emerging themes from the data, I engaged in a calculated approach of iterative analysis by being immersed in the data. I did this by recording, collecting, and analyzing data in a focused way to ensure I had a process of learning, and then I clustered ideas and concepts while seeking feedback from others (Richards, 2015). This continual iterative process of revisiting data, reexamining the idea clusters, and repeating as necessary was to ensure that I was focused on an accurate, in-depth description of data. Richards stated that this reflective approach allows the data to be a connection in an applicable form to the context being studied.

As part of my data analysis, I identified 327 statements from leaders and 286 statements from the followers that were significant to this study. I continued to refine and examine the data to understand the underlying cluster of ideas, which were further developed as they evolved into a collection of meanings based on the interviews with both leaders and their followers. These clusters then became a series of themes that reflected how participants expressed their lived experiences during organizational change. In using this method, I unearthed a series of themes from my review of the participant data, which were the following: the interpretation of responsibility and authority during organizational change, the collaborative (shared) leadership during organizational change, the duality of roles mid-level leaders have during organizational change, and the ambiguity of leadership during organizational change.

The first theme was the *perceptions of responsibility and authority* of mid-level leaders. This theme is essentially how the organizational change modified dynamics of perceived responsibility and authority experienced by mid-level leaders. Mid-level leaders expressed trepidation about how much power and responsibility they had during organizational change. They described the way responsibility and authority manifests itself during organizational change and how it affects their view of their leadership role. Participants expressed this as being one of the most stressful aspects of leading during organizational change. Both leaders and followers shared this perception, but from different points of view. Specifically, the leaders stated that the modifications of responsibility and authority created an internal sense of confusion with their leadership role and responsibility during the organizational change.

The second theme, *shared leadership during organizational change*, is about how power and leadership during organizational change were shared among various individuals. Participants discussed how leadership during organizational change was made even more difficult because of the competing points of view and priorities among the collaborative leaders. In essence, this theme relates to how collaborative leadership in higher education created challenges during the organizational change. Many of the participants in the study discussed how the sharing of leadership during organizational change led to frustration and confusion about the direction of how to lead during organizational change.

The third theme, *the duality of the mid-level leader role,* concerns how participants viewed their role and responsibilities associated with leading their units through organizational change, as well as the whole organization, as part of a leadership team. The essence of this theme is how mid-level leaders experienced the internal tensions when trying to do what is right for the whole organization as well as what is right for the units that they have direct authority and responsibility over during organizational change. Mid-level leaders stated that this was an ongoing issue, which led to some of the stresses they felt while being a leader during organizational change. Participants expressed concern on how this unique duality in their roles placed them in positions of conflict.

The fourth theme was how the leaders and followers view the *ambiguity of leadership during organizational change*. This theme reflects the way followers interpreted events and their perception of their leaders' actions during organizational change. In essence, this theme expresses the followers' confusion with the scope of responsibility, formal authority, and power their mid-level leaders had leading organizational change. The theme also covers how mid-level leaders described their view of what they understood to be the vision or reason for the organizational change and differences in interpretation with what mid-level leaders were doing during organizational change. This, in essence, describes both leaders' and followers' interpretations of what they deemed a lack of a unified strategy or clear direction during organizational change. Participant followers expressed that they did not ever fully grasp the overall vision or goals of the organizational change. There was an expectation that their mid-level leaders would provide clues via their actions, decisions, and activities on how and which ways the organizational change was unfolding, whereas leaders believed they were clear on what was occurring.

Theme One: Perceptions of Responsibility and Authority During Change

During organizational change, mid-level leaders described their lived experience in terms of how the shifts in responsibility and the uncertainty of authority affect them as leaders. These responsibilities shifted from those of individuals who were used to leading their units before the organizational change and having formal control of their organizational lives to circumstances where there was uncertainty of responsibility and authority. In describing their experiences of how the modification of the structure changed their scope of responsibility and authority, one individual said this:

> Well, for me, it made ... So, I lost a lot of authority. I had a very full portfolio of responsibilities. And as a component of the merger, there was an effort to consolidate responsibilities. And so, my [areas] of responsibilities, as well as the authority that went with that diminished.

This experience was similar to how other leaders described their experience when they sought to understand how and why the change was occurring. They expressed their lived experiences from a sense of the difficulty they had when trying to understand their authority and responsibilities during the organizational change. They viewed this as one part of the challenges of the organizational change experience. While leaders realized that they had a responsibility to lead the organizational change, there were questions about what the ramifications meant to them personally. Franklin's description of the change from his experience was one of stress and difficulty of having to accept the repercussion of approaches during organizational change:

> I think it was more antagonistic than it had to be. I think part of that was because it was a top-down decision. There was a decision that was made and then it was our responsibility to make it happen.

In a sense, this lack of a voice for individuals accustomed to being in leadership positions with some formal authority over their areas in the organization further contributed to their views and experiences with a top-down approach. It then led to a requirement for mid-level leaders to re-conceptualize their authority and power during the organizational change process. Francis described her experience during organizational change as a multi-step process:

> Leading change, I think you're [the mid-level leader] somewhat dealing with your own inner self and kind of getting around how well do you deal with change yourself. And then you're thinking about the other individuals who you're responsible for in the sense of you're the leader.

Similarly, another leader, Bob, expressed how the organizational change highlighted the responsibility and authority of mid-level leaders during organizational change. Bob described his experience during the change from a perspective of authority and responsibility based on his role within the structure of the organization. Concerning what he perceived his responsibility and authority to be as a mid-level leader, Bob described it the following way:

> What are things that at some level, I'm here [describing his level in organizational hierarchy] in an organization? There are others that are clearly ... [Higher in the organization hierarchy, and] have more authority than I had even from the standpoint of the change agent.

The experience of how participant leaders determined what was within their authority and responsibilities were expressed in the way mid-level leaders viewed their role in the change effort and how they viewed their responsibilities during the organizational change.

Some leaders' descriptions of the top-down approach highlighted how it affected their perceptions of their responsibility during organizational change. In some statements, they revealed from where they believed their authority and responsibility was derived. In doing so, participants expressed that there was both on external examination as well as an inner one when understanding the nature of their authority. This idea was highlighted by the way one participant described where his formal authority comes from:

> So, I derive authority when the reporting relationship is clear. Okay, for example if I come in a room and say, this is going to happen! and it's clear to everyone that it's being generated by whatever the [Executive Administrator] that I report to.

Another participant leader expressed how this organizational change highlighted his view of responsibility and authority. Bob explained that some of these shifts in authority and responsibilities help him clarify his internal view of what was his authority and responsibility.

> I kind of take the approach that I'm given a charge; I'm going to go fulfill my responsibility, so I feel like I have a duty to do what I'm asked to do. And if I don't understand it, then I try to understand it and get clarification. I get a pay check from the [organization] that tells me this is what they expect of me, and so when I'm asked to do something, there's a duty to try to fulfill.

Similarly, another mid-level leader participant, Francis, described her experience with authority and responsibility by revealing her internal focus of her responsibility during organizational change:

> When you're going to lead people in the organization, if it's something that, you know, maybe you're not 100% on board with yourself [as mid-level leader], but at the end of the day if [it is] my responsibility is that "I've got to ... This is going to happen, and I've got to bring this whole group of people with me."

Barbara also viewed her approach during the organizational change as one where there was expected responsibility based on her role:

> At some point, someone's entrusted me and said that I am somebody who's a leader. And so I effectively know, as a leader, that you've [I've] got to champion change, and you've got to help others along the way and help them see where they fit into the big picture of whatever that change is.

Contributing to this theme of authority and responsibility, participants highlighted that they derived authority not necessarily from a formal role but from knowledge. This knowledge was based on some mid-level leaders' understanding of the tactical operations of the organizations. During organizational change, mid-level leaders had to make decisions associated with modifications of a process and operational aspect due to the merger. Barbara stated, "In some ways, I felt like I walked in with this arsenal of some sort of knowledge base of how a lot of different things operate and what could be done."

Another mid-level leader, James, like Barbara, saw his responsibility and authority as being based on his knowledge within the organization. James explained how experience added to his authority and responsibility during the organizational change: "I say that in that the understanding of the [resources] can tell you many things about a direction the organization possibly will take, and yet has not taken."

The first theme, perceptions of authority and responsibility, described how mid-level leaders expressed their view of how they acknowledged that the organizational change was either modifying or clarifying their roles within the organization. These expressions of their experiences reflected the mid-level leaders' understanding of how and where they had influence, authority, and responsibility during the organizational change. Some mid-level leaders internalized how the organizational change modified their ability to influence, motivate, and effect organizational change. Various participants expressed that their perceptions of how organizational change unfolded with shifts in structure affected their authority and sense of power. How these shifts occurred and were expressed is tied to the second theme—shared leadership during organizational change. This theme provides insights into mid-level leaders' understanding of shared leadership and limits to their lone ability to enact change across a whole university enterprise.

Theme Two: Shared Leadership During Organizational Change

In describing how leadership of organizational change was made more difficult and frustrating, various participants expressed an issue with shared leadership. When discussing their experiences during the organizational change, multiple participants pointed out that the nature of shared leadership made the change more difficult and frustrating.

Various participant mid-level leaders noted that during the changes there were various negotiations on how and in what way organizational modifications were going to take place. However, because of this approach, there was a sense of angst among mid-level leaders and a lack of clear direction. James described the nature of shared leadership of organizational change in the following way:

> Yes, there's a lack of clarity, there is a lack of sense of direction, so convoluted includes simply a lack of clarity, a void of leadership in [Organization B], primarily because of part of the identification of the dominant coalition within [Organization A].

Other leaders described how shared leadership made them have to adjust to the fact that the organizational change was new to all individuals. Bob described it as such: "The [shared leadership] created some frustration in some of the decision points that were being made about 'Okay. We're having to do this.' Some of that was just a learning experience on what should or shouldn't be changed."

Mid-level leaders were faced with various questions due to how the shared leadership approach worked and how it affected the organizational change process. Participant mid-level leaders noted they had to adapt to organizational changes based on how much influence they had within their scope of authority. Bob described how he experienced the shared leadership approach during organizational change.

> Okay, we have a compromise [on a direction,] if you will. Whether or not it makes sense [is a separate question]; then, there's [a] limited ability to make those changes. So, yeah, you're drawing distinctions all the time between, kind of, what can I truly control in this process of change and about what can I merely make recommendations [about] in terms of change that may or may not be implemented? Things that are outside of my day-to-day authority and purview but are still important from an integration standpoint for the university as a whole.

This shared leadership required mid-level participants to make deliberate decisions on the appropriate delineations of organizational change. This process of continual review of agreed-upon modifications across the organization, in turn, affected mid-level leaders' ability to lead their individual units. Bob expressed how this shared leadership affected his ability to move his units forward, which highlights his experience of leading during organizational change.

> It created some frustration in some of the decision points that were being made about “Okay. We have to do this.” They’re supposed to follow our [business process] in terms of the [Organization B]. And then [after agreed-upon decision] you’re getting a different message through a different mechanism to [Office A] where they’re specifying, yeah, but your [business process] doesn’t apply because we have this exception. So, there was some clear confusion in that process at times about ... [What was agreed?] Some of those just didn’t make sense.

Barbara echoed the lack of certainty about what was agreed upon because of the shared leadership: “The biggest frustration and irritation that felt [during organizational change] like we had made decisions on this or how this was supposed to go this way. Then having to reverse course on some things.”

Some mid-level leaders expressed concern and frustrations due to individuals from various parts of the two organizations making decisions outside the negotiated approach. Francis noted, “The hard part then were, at [some] this point, is dealing with all the other units that had to do their parts for us to be able to do our parts.”

Francis expanded on how the shared leadership of organizational coordination was unstructured and void of decision making: “I felt it was very disorganized, that there were a lot of questions. But a lot of times, there were no answers”.

Other mid-level leaders began questioning themselves when there was lack of follow-through with agreed-upon organizational modifications. This sense of re-analysis contributed to what some individuals expressed as reasons for mid-level leaders not knowing how to set direction within their own units. Bob further described how his experience with the shared leadership approach affected his view of himself and his ability to be an effective leader.

> Because of the nature of where we work and sit, there is always a sense of trying to understand if I'm going too far with what was agreed upon in prior series of meetings. How do I move my group forward, and others are sitting still waiting to do what was agreed? So I wonder did I go too far, have I done more than what was required, will I have to go back on prior decisions?

Francis described how the shared leadership approach over her units of responsibility affected her as a mid-level leader and the trepidation she had when trying to understand organizational modifications that may have been agreed on. Since this shared leadership was new to most mid-level leaders and their concept of final decisions, it frequently required them to go back and make changes to what they had understood was decided. She said, "So in the end, they had to be patient. I had to be patient, but they also wanted to get the job done, but we couldn't make some of the decisions and move forward until we got answers."

How shared leadership manifested during organizational change caused various participant leaders anxiety in leading their individual units. One participant expressed it in the following way:

> It was stressful because you can't give your people answers. When you're leading people, and you can't give them answers and you're just feeling somewhat like you're in the dark, it's hard to go back and tell them that. But you have to be honest. I had to be honest.

This lack of a cohesive shared leadership among individuals in both merging organizations created a sense of uncertainty for mid-level leaders and made them less inclined to react to possible decisions.

Certain mid-level leaders began to rely on their experience to see their way forward and did not necessarily understand who was in charge during the shared leadership approach. James viewed this lack of cohesion within the shared leadership with trepidation and delayed implementing any of the organizational change. In his view, he should not act until it was finally decided. He expressed his approach in the following way.

> Leadership is about presence, so when it is devoid of presence and simply yielding to every action, then you respond to the actions from the other party. In essence, there's really no change; it's determining again who is, in fact, a dominant with regard to movement.

Both participant leaders and followers presented this view of shared leadership during organizational change in describing their experiences.

Many described how shared leadership created a sense that the leaders were uncoordinated and unstructured in their shared approach of their leadership of the organizational change. Bob stated, "I guess the shared leadership of this change was unstructured. It leads to some of our problems because, I guess, you never really knew where we stood when it came [to] certain decisions." Participants expressed that at various points they looked at the leadership activities that they had used in past organizational changes as a guide, but they found that those models were lacking.

The second theme of shared leadership during organizational change was viewed with frustration. It fostered perceptions of leaders being unable to lead during change and being unable to reconcile various tactical concerns, perception repeatedly shared by the various leaders and followers in describing their experiences during organizational change. Both leader and follower participants noted that how they made sense of a mid-level leader's action was influenced by shared leadership and the way it manifests in the behaviors that were exhibited by each leader. Mid-level leaders expressed that they were tied to the work of others while working to lead their units during organizational change. This reliance is captured in the following theme, the duality of mid-level leaders.

Theme Three: The Duality of the Mid-level Leader Role

The third theme, the duality of the mid-level leader role, describes how leaders experience concerns regarding the dual responsibility they have during organizational change and the burden of a leadership as well as its effect on them from a personal perspective when making decisions because of their leadership roles during this time.

Regarding the duality of the mid-level role during organizational change, leaders expressed their concerns about decisions they made during organizational change. Leaders saw their role as dualistic in that they had to make distinctions between what is right for the organization and what is right for their individual units. Specifically, this theme expressed how participant leaders played the roles of both leader and follower during the organizational change, whether due to the hierarchy of their formal positions within the organization or as leaders of a team across organizational units looking for a sense of direction.

A few participants, in view of the duality of their roles based on formal positions, expressed how they viewed their leadership role during organizational change.
Bob described the duality of his role: "One was the role related to the specific areas that I supervised, the other part … was focused on the bigger picture of how to integrate, as between [University B] and [University A]."

This dichotomy generated a process where leaders had to make choices about how to proceed while understanding that the impact of these decisions would be felt within their own groups as well as by individuals across the organization. Further expanding his view on the dual leadership roles he and other mid-leaders had during organizational change, Bob stated, “The small leadership committee that we had there was differences and comprimises…., and things that would come out of that that would ultimately move other parts of the organization.”

This duality of leadership responsibility for mid-level leaders also created a sense of anxiety for leaders in deciding the appropriate actions for moving the organizational change forward because some viewed them from the perspective of the impact on individuals within both organizations. Bob expressed these sentiments by saying,

> It was challenging in the sense of there are people involved, period. And so we’re talking about people’s jobs, their day-to-day functions, and at some level, when we were talking about merging these two groups together, at some level, there’s a duplication.

The leaders expressed the concern and the weight of some of the decisions that had to be made in regard to trying to accomplish their goals for the organization as a whole. One leader noted, “You are trying to accomplish moving the organization forward, and that means you have to create levels of efficiencies within the organization that are the result of that merger.”

Leaders expressed difficulty with some of the decisions that had to be made during organizational change. Mid-level leaders were continually reminded of how the impact of their decisions affected individuals, and the magnitude of that reality affected them as leaders. Bob gave this example:

> And so there are people involved, and that was particularly difficult to try to figure out. You don't want people to lose their job[s]. That's not what your goal is, that's not what you're trying to accomplish, but you do have a ... job to do. You are trying to accomplish moving the organization forward. Some of that was particularly challenging, and it creates a level of stress, just because there are people that are attached to the decision.

Mid-level leaders created a sense of detachment when making these decisions and examined the effects based on what the overall goal with the organizational change was Francis expressed it like so:

> So, it weighed on me from the standpoint of having to make the decision on, 'Okay, what's the right course of action here?' It creates a level of discomfort: you're impacting somebody's life. So for me, you have to remind yourself that this is not about necessarily the individual, it's about the institution as a whole, and how does the institution want to move forward.

Other participants echoed this negative by pointing out how the change required them to rethink their natural inclinations of how to discuss and work with their employees. Bob explained how this duality of mid-level leaders caused him to change his natural inclination as a leader:

> So for me, my preference in some respects, is to be open, honest, have actual real dialogue about what can and can't be done, but when you deal, in some of these situations, the ability to do that is not always possible.

This duality of leadership for mid-level leaders created some situations where participants modified how they would work with their individual units and how they would communicate with their followers. One participant mid-level leader put it in these words:

> [As a mid-level leader] your hands are tied somewhat in what you can do, but at least from my viewpoint, I felt like your hands are tied a little bit in terms of how upfront and honest you can be. ... Honest isn't the right word; it's really more of how upfront and how much information you can share at any given point in time.

The above statement illustrates another duality of mid-level leaders during organizational change, that of of being both leaders and followers within the organization. While this situation is due in part to where these participants reside in the organizational hierarchy, participants noted that it is also due to their operational knowledge and activity. This was expressed in earlier themes by various leaders in discussing how they perceived the organizational change enacted, but this theme adds the perspective of their sense of how organizational change unfolded and how things were implemented. Francis expressed the duality of mid-level leadership in the following way:

> So I'm going to make sure that I'm going to carry out something and get it accomplished. I don't [want to] let other people down. But I also know that the [organization A] has entrusted me in each of the leadership positions I've been in.

James added to this theme of mid-level duality as a leader during organizational change, saying, "I support leadership. I will, certainly, will inform them of an array of possibilities from all peripheral sides." In describing his experience and the duality of his role, James remarked, "I know that I don't control the merger. I facilitate the merger, with the understanding that there's certain pieces that have to be [accomplished]." Franklin described this duality when discussing how his role was to both inform executive leadership and then effect the organizational change based on their decisions.

> So, one of [my] jobs was to sit down with leadership on the [Organization B] and say, "These are really important. Here's the [reason]. This is why it's important." And as a consequence, if you go that route. [So I] was taking the lead in terms of informing, [but] so, yes, [I was] leading that [part of] change. Now, the decision making resided at multiple levels.

Participant mid-level leadership duality was explored from a followership view as well as when examining a leader's areas of responsibility. Views were similar to how followers expressed their responsibilities during organizational change. Matthew expressed a similar view from a follower's viewpoint to what leaders held within the organization concerning the duality conflict.

> So like the [Organization Change] project, trying to understand what the university wants to get done, and hear from the higher-level folks who will develop what our approach will be and what needs to get done. But once that's clear, then following up on specific tasks and the actual implementation, then I think that again in my role, follows more on me leading that rather the following the actual work.

Barbara added to the theme of duality of mid-level leadership during organizational change from the perspective of one who saw her role expanded based on organizational, tactical knowledge. Barbara described this in the following way: "In some way, I felt like the new merging entity was looking to me for answers on how things work or what they were expected to do when it came to functions under my control." In Barbara's description of her leadership during change, she discussed not only leading through knowledge of the units she had direct authority for, but in this instance, the organizational change as a whole.

The third theme, duality of mid-level leaders during organizational change, illustrates how leaders described their experiences serving multiple roles within the organization. These roles were expressed as the dual role of leading units as well as the organization, the challenge of leading those being followed, and the issue with trying to operationalize organizational change, specifically with the stress and frustrations related to each of these aspects of the duality.

Theme Four: The Ambiguity of Leadership

The fourth theme, the ambiguity of leadership, describes how both leaders and followers perceived leadership during organizational change. Various participants believed the ambiguous nature of direction affected their understanding of what was occurring during the change. This was a recurring theme with various leaders and follower participants when describing their lived experiences during organizational change. All participants expressed a cluster of ideas that centered on expressions of confusion, frustration, and anxiety related to leadership and leaders during organizational change.

Various participant leaders described how a leader's interpretation of the reason for organizational change contributed to the ambiguity of leadership during change.Where some leaders believe there was a clear approach and direction others did not agree, in providing and example a mid-level leader described this ambiguity in the following way:

> I thought there was no confusion. It was not a question of, oh this isn't the right thing to do or we shouldn't do it this way or we shouldn't do that. This was something that was ... okay, there was clear direction given; it wasn't a moral issue, it was an issue of this is what the organization has chosen to do for the betterment of the university. It's about the institution as a whole, and how does the institution want to move forward. And part of the reason why the merger was taking place was to create efficiencies.

While this mid-level leader perceived there was a clear understanding of the direction for the university, another, in describing his experience with organizational change, held the view that there were issues still up for negotiation. He described it the following way:

> I thought the important thing to do when there was really an issue that we thought we needed as an [organization], there's something unique about our services, then I think it was important to stand up and say, we need this!

The differing views of multiple mid-level leaders concerning the vision, purpose, and reasoning of the organizational change affected how mid-level leaders interpreted their responsibility and direction. Bob described how sometimes there was a sense of exasperation with the ambiguous nature of leadership during organizational change that this affected his view of the organizational change:

> Frustrating, at times. There were points in times where I felt like we were moving the organization forward in the way that it was designed, and others were just not doing anything.

Bob's expression of the frustration with activities on the direction of organizational change caused problems for how he was able to lead during the change. He noted:

> Frustration and irritation that I felt [during organizational change] was like we had made decisions on this, and this was supposed to go this way. Then having to reverse course on some things. So, you sometimes ... or I sometimes got the feeling that some of the things that we had done and some of the meetings that we had were ... had been a waste of time because you're having to do it all over again.

This issue of having to re-discuss the vision for the change made some leaders internalize their concerns and begin to question their understanding of the organizational change. One leader described it in the following way:

> So the question becomes, am I pushing it too far? And so you raise the subconscious level of questions and doubts about is this the right answer or are others not pushing enough? And so there's some level of doubt created about did I misunderstand? If everybody else is not changing, not integrating the way that I'd understood it...

As further support of the theme of ambiguity of leadership during change, followers reflected that, in their experience, they interpreted leaders' actions and activities based on what they believed were decisions about direction. Rebecca described her experiences with the topic in the following way:

> In a lot of ways, it was frustrating because it felt like we weren't getting answers we needed as quickly as we needed them, given the time frame we had to implement the merger. Then this committee or that group, and then a lot of times the answer would change because there was pushback.

Often, followers moved forward without explicit leadership mandates, as one noted: "Sometimes it was, let's do what makes sense for the sake of moving on, and that way if we don't get an answer, we at least have something in place, or if we do get an answer, then we'll adjust as needed."

Some followers framed this ambiguity of leadership during organizational change by what they expected from their mid-level leaders. Rebecca said,

> I think that was a lot of the direction that I personally looked for from my leader was, what is this supposed to look like? Where are we ultimately going with this? And some of those higher levels answers so that we could work out the details and how we were going to accomplish that.

However, for certain leaders it was unclear that followers were not getting the support they required. One leader stipulated that direction and communication was part of the decision process and information was provided as it was needed. The leader observed,

> During the course of the merger, there was a lot of change, and that was because a decision was made, that [decision] had [with it] an educational component going out to the [Stakeholders] and relaying those changes to them. They obviously were quite concerned about the changes. So we needed to relay that information to them. So that was actually a very busy time for me in terms of affecting change.

Another mid-level leader understood that followers were frustrated with a lack of communication, which heightened the sense of ambiguity of leadership during organizational change. Participant leaders sometimes made decisions to delay specific activities because of the stress they sensed from their followers. Bob explained:

> It caused modifications in some of the decisions I would make. So, seeing the stress level of some of my employees had me making decisions about, okay, there are certain things from a priority standpoint that have to be put off. We couldn't do all the things that I felt like we really ought to do in part because of the stress that was there. Some changes had to be delayed and put on hold simply.

Moreover, how and what responses leaders were able to discuss with their followers affected these mid-level leaders as well Bob described it like so:

> Some of the decisions that were delayed. That for me is difficult because it meant delaying other ways that I thought we could move the institution forward. But that decision, in some respects, was made above me to make this a priority. So it was a matter of, okay, let's manage the time and the effort.

In a similar way, followers discussed how they looked to their leader for direction but because of the ambiguity of leadership during the change, answers were not easily attained. Francis expressed this view when recalling how she mentioned to her leadership the frustrations she felt with the lack of a clear direction and slow progress of decisions:

> It wasn't smooth, it was ... I felt it was very disorganized, that there were a lot of questions. But a lot of times, there were no answers. There wasn't a ... and I vocalized this at one point; I thought that there should have been a set leader for this.

Clearly, followers were frustrated by the ambiguity of leadership during organizational change. Susan said, "Sometimes it was just, throughout the whole merger there was ... there's a lot of uncertainty anyway on what's going to happen." The ambiguity with the merger certainly influenced individuals who were used to structure. One follower, Jake, noted, "It kind of threw me. I need an agenda. I need a plan." This need for a clear vision from their leaders was again discussed by Jake while describing how he lived this experience: "That was part of the challenge, the part that we lived was a lack of information of how it was going to work" Moreover, followers expressed how the timing of shared information led to their anxiety about the merger. Jake noted, "And I think the hardest part was having to do everything we do on a daily basis and also do this with little direction of how to make it work." Other follower participants expressed similar sentiments. For example, Rebecca described how she felt about the leadership during the organizational change:

> I felt like we were kind of the middlemen in some respects because these people up here were telling us, "This is what you're doing, this is what you have to do." When people would ask us, "Why are we doing it this way?" and, we were asking ourselves that, too, and we were kind of caught in the middle between the two of them having to kind of put on a happy face and go, "This is what we're doing."

There were some followers who understood the value and reasons for the change but felt there were still issues with ambiguity of leadership during change due to multiple levels of leadership being required to coordinate a complex merger. Jackie illustrated this concept:

> I felt like it was probably a good idea and that there were good things about it but that it was decided. And, that's fine because there are always those people higher up that make those decisions; they're the ones who make that decision, but I don't feel as though there was a lot of thought given by them to what all it would entail and how that would affect those people who were doing the actual work of making the merger happen and work.

Additionally, participants who served as both a leaders and followers during organizational change described how the coped with the ambiguity of leadership by engaging with others in informal communications (a grapevine network) to get a sense of how the organizational change was unfolding and gain an understanding of what others understood was the tactical direction. Francis described one such humorous event:

> So then, we're sitting there comparing, and we're not even on the same page, and it wasn't like me and this other leader were confrontational with each other. We're just comparing notes to like, "Here's all this information that's supposed to be flowing down, but you've got this piece of information, I got this, and they contradict."

The ambiguity of leadership was expressed in how leaders described events surrounding their decisions and the way in which followers perceived the outcomes of those decisions. While some participant leaders viewed this process of negotiated agreements as part of the organizational change, followers used these approaches to take cues about what and how change activities were taking place. However, from either view, there was vagueness on what was to be done or why something was occurring. Some followers sought structure and needed to reconcile their leaders' approaches to that of others whom they felt had a more accurate depiction of what was occurring. Others working on the organizational change tried to make sense of the organizational change based on their own understanding, while also questioning and internalizing their understanding of their efforts to lead organizational change. Some followers, like their leaders, expressed confusion and frustration when there was a perception of nonalignment with what they understood about the organizational change and what they were seeing occur during the merger. This theme, therefore, is reflected in the information provided by both followers and leaders on how they lived this experience.

Association of Themes to Research Questions

To gain an understanding of how leading during organizational change affects both leaders and followers, I posed four questions to help guide me through my investigation and provide a scaffolding to aid in the understanding of leaders and their followers' lived experiences during organizational change. These series of questions offered me a way to uncover the essence of the phenomenon, allowing me to examine participants' shared experiences. I used these research questions to gain insights from the data, giving me a method to extract their individual lived experiences, which then intertwined into emergent themes. I, in turn, embedded the themes in a structure of meaning that helps to answer the research questions.

How Do Mid-Level Leaders in Higher Education Describe Their Experiences During Organizational Change?

The first research question sought to understand what individual leaders go through when leading organizational change and how they experience it. Although various studies on the subject look at activities and behaviors exhibited in many different organizational circumstances, I sought to gain insights on how individuals experienced leading two educational organizations through a merger. Leadership during organizational change is a challenge for any leader; the following section will describe the challenges for mid-level leaders, who have both informal and formal delegated authority in their roles, as well as other responsibilities delegated to them by their executive leadership (Likert, 1961). Throughout this study, I bracketed my preconceived notions of leadership to gain insights from the data presented by participants. I took first-person accounts of the mid-level participants' experiences to gain insight into how mid-level leaders in higher education view their experiences of organizational change.

In this study, mid-level leader participants described various facets of their experiences but those experiences all ultimately converged through the lenses of power, role uncertainty, shared leadership, and responsibility. Mid-level leaders described their roles of leadership during organizational change as being that of individuals who had to reconcile their internal views of the organizational change and their perceptions of their place within the organization's leadership with their responsibility for leading their followers during organizational change. The mid-level leader participants also described their perceptions of authority and responsibility.

Leaders described the chaotic nature of leading organizational change from the perspective of how sharing leadership, authority, and responsibility modified aspects of their organizational lives and affected them and their ability to lead. The mid-level leader participants described their experiences as chaotic, lacking clarity, stressful, and frustrating, and they also reflected on how their decisions affected people.

While all leaders vaguely described leadership during organizational change as in some ways frustrating, it was more than that. The frustration came from the stress of the unknown, the perception of a lack of coordinated activities, the misunderstanding of agreements, the need to share formal authority and power, and a lack of clarity and information. Mid-level leaders also discussed their frustration related to sharing leadership among various individuals, making it more difficult to, as some participants called it, “move the organization forward.”

In reflecting on their experiences, mid-level leader participants described having to work with followers who consistently asked questions and expressed stress about the unknown. Bob reflected on this when explaining how he dealt with the unknowns of shared leadership and direction. “Seeing the stress level of some of my employees had me making decisions about, okay, there are certain things from a priority standpoint that have to be put off.”

Mid-level leaders expressed their frustration with what information they could communicate with their followers. They described having to balance sharing sensitive information with followers with followers’ desire to be informed. Bob noted:

> So, I can recall times where I was frustrated by the constant request for more and more needed information. At some level, it was okay just to do this. But, it was important to me that people have to get a level of comfort and understanding where I wasn’t forcing ... at some level, I could have just said, ‘Look. Go do this! This is what we have to do!’

This inability to provide information caused some to try to strike a balance between influencing and motivating their followers and being authoritative in their approach.

Mid-level leaders also expressed concerns about their ability to lead and how their followers viewed them. Some said that leading during organizational change created situations where leaders understood that some of the decisions they made diminished their followers’ trust.

Some spoke of how a lack of clarity about and knowledge of what was being decided, as discussed in the shared leadership theme caused a loss of confidence if leaders could not provide a vision or reasons for the organizational change. Barbara elaborated on this element: “I felt like I could never tell them anything with a degree of confidence, or I had to assure them that that was the answer at that moment, and it might change.” Barbra also verbalized the sense of uncertainty leaders described when speaking about not being confident or able to provide a clear direction to followers:

> I kind of felt like I was trying to support them into what I think was their frustration, but at the same time, I was feeling it as well because I didn’t have better information for them, and I couldn’t necessarily provide them the stability that maybe so many of us didn’t have.

In recalling their experiences during organizational change, some mid-level leaders spoke about stability. In recalling their experiences with leadership, some leaders said that they constantly felt both worry and excitement. Barbara described this sensation:

> I remember at one point comparing it to walking a high wire with no nets. Because, on the one hand, we were doing a remarkable thing that was cool, that not a lot of people were doing, but, yeah, we were freaking out up there. But at the same time, it’s like, things could go terribly wrong in an instant.

Others spoke about the sense of loss tied to both them individually and to an understanding of their role (because of the shared leadership and duality of leadership themes presented earlier). Some mid-level leader participants also expressed how before the organizational change there was clarity and identity tied to their formal authority. During the organizational change, it became a dubious endeavor to try and identify their roles as leaders. Franklin said, “It was like, before we changed, there was a clear indication of how leadership flowed, but now it is like a tree with multiple branches. That is how I would describe what it looks like now.”

Some leaders reflected on their experience as it related to specific decisions that affected people's lives. Some leaders spoke of their attempts in trying to negotiate the value of their areas and the individuals. During the merger, some mid-level leaders lost power and authority, yet this is not what they reflected on when describing this process. One leader stated, "While I tried to make a case, I was not able to win the day." In recalling his experience, another mid-level leader participant spoke of the sense of loss and remorse when speaking of how leading the change affected him personally. Due to shared leadership, some mid-level leaders were required to implement actions and perform activities they may not have agreed with, including some that impact people's lives. Franklin described one such experience:

> So I understand that [the decision], I accept that [decision]. But it does not always make you feel good when you lose authority. I always felt very bad that I was the person that was at the point in terms of dealing with bad news. It was hard to have to tell people that their services were no longer needed or that they were moving to a different organization. I had to tell all 19 of them, which was not very pleasant, so it is always tough.

Based on their descriptions of their lived experience of leading during organizational change, it is clear that mid-level leaders dealt with the ambiguity of leadership as well as complexities of shared leadership and being part of decisions that made times difficult. Mid-level leaders' experiences as leaders during this time concerned how individuals deal with the realities of organizational change, or as one mid-level leader stated, "In the end, organizational change is about decisions and the people attached to those decisions."

How Do Leaders' Self-Perception of Their Leadership Role Change Based on Their Experiences During an Organizational Change?

My second question sought to understand if leaders' self-perceptions of themselves and their role changed because of leading organizational change. As previously described earlier, various participants provided some context to how leadership worked during this time and either modified their view of themselves as leaders or caused some to modify their behavior based on their experiences.

During interviews, a question was asked: "Do you believe the experience of leading organizational change has modified your view of yourself and how you lead?" Various leaders reflected on how, if at all, they changed their approach to leading.

Leaders described the ways the change affected leading during this time; some described the effects it had on their approach. One example provided by a leader was that leading during organizational change made him or her more apprehensive and aware of his or her role within the organization.

One leader described how he viewed himself going forward: "I think that it has, if anything, simply caused me to be more cautious." Other leaders provided examples of to what extent it was in their ability to enact and deal with organizational change, which was expressed by participants in the themes of shared leadership and the perception of responsibility and authority. Meanwhile, other mid-level leader participants reflected on how the merger highlighted their formal and informal authority within the organization. Various mid-level participants expressed their need to be reliant on information as well as visionary direction from their executive leadership. Some described their place within the organization hierarchy while expressing their understanding of their scope of responsibility, power, and authority. Many mid-level participants used phrases such as "my place," "others have more," and "I have been entrusted" while describing the amount of authority they had over the change and their respective roles within the organizational change hierarchy.

During their interviews, several mid-level leaders described the organizational change from a transactional and operational viewpoint. Even so, participant leaders expressed their need to change their behaviors when it came to transparency and clarity in leading. When discussing how they worked with their followers and the university, they saw a need to change their behaviors and activities in the future. Jackie revealed that, due to the frustrations and sense of helplessness she felt during organizational change, she would be more cognizant of how to communicate and discuss decisions with her followers and teams on a project she is leading going forward. She said, "I think that particular instance helped further and kind of improve how I am going to approach projects or approach communication with people; not only internally with my team, but also externally with other teams."

Jackie shared how she internalized the questions and reflected on the organizational change:

> Okay, [as a leader] I can also affect confusion, and I can make people stressed out if I don't plan. So that's when you go back, and then I try to reflect on—okay, well, how did I feel in the midst of that project? So I need to be cognizant of that because I don't want others that I'm supervising—or I want them to take a project to feel that same way. I want them to feel like they have all the information or everything that I can give them, So I think what it does is help you to look at how do you want to lead change?

Likewise, while reflecting on and examining their role as leaders during organizational change, some mid-level leader participants focused inward on how they perceive themselves. Some participant leaders described themselves and the role they inadvertently played during the change as the individual who provided a sense of stability for followers. Barbara noted that in organizational change, “You lose that sense of stability, and I think some people need that.” In describing their roles, mid-level leaders stated they believe their roles changed over time, “from being an overseer,” to “being a team player,” to “being a person in charge of communication with various stakeholders” who were affected by decisions.

In the end, this organizational change highlighted the importance of a mid-level leader’s view of their role during organizational change and revealed that it modified their internal sense and understanding of themselves as leaders in regard to authority and responsibility. Various participants spoke to the idea that they were the leaders who were the ones in charge of making this merger work, viewing themselves as having a professional duty and a professional responsibility.

What Are Followers’ Perceptions of Their Leaders’ Role in Organizational Change?

The third research question focused on understanding how followers viewed the role of their leaders during organizational change. It sought to gain insights into how a follower interpreted the observed the actions of their leaders. This question is associated with the themes ambiguity of leadership and shared leadership, wherein participants expressed the challenges both leaders and followers had during the merger.

The followers' perspectives were influenced by their follower type and how they described their relationship in regard to both strength and the amount of interaction they had with their leader. At various times, alienated participants expressed the sense that there was no leadership in the organizational change. Some of these follower types spoke of how they were not confident in the leader or how they led in providing timely direction. One described it in the following way:

> [I would] sit there and try to get anybody in a leadership position to answer a question. Sometimes, you lost a little bit of trust in people that you were working for because, sometimes, I didn't feel like they had your back or were always available to go to or was able to solve an issue in a timely fashion.

Alienated followers described their leaders' roles based on their perceptions without an understanding of the individuals who were sharing leadership and authority during the organizational change. In their view, this led to followers not trusting in the certainty of their decisions. As one follower said,

> We would have discussions behind closed doors and say, [agree that] this is how things should be. But then, when it came time actually to make decisions, there was this lenience there. It's like, and he's not going to make the decision he said we needed to make; we're going to go a different route with this. Whatever he said to me, right out the window. We're going to end up going in another direction because he doesn't want to fight this fight.

In the same way, there were some followers who prior to the organizational change were considered exemplary based on their responses of their experiences with their leader, but because of the act of the organizational change, they became pragmatic survivors. These individuals, because of the closeness of their relationship with their leader, understood the limits of their leader's role and authority. One described some of these interactions in the following way:

> I would probably go as far to say that some days, the [leader] might have not known which way we should go because I think there was a lot of changing of thoughts, directions, concepts, even after it was just said, "Okay, we're going to do this merger." And sometimes, I think that [decisions] were changing on a daily, weekly basis, depending on who the players were and what was discussed.

Other followers, in describing the role of their leadership, understood that the leaders were in the same situation they were in and tried to make sense of their roles and responsibilities during the organizational change. Various followers spoke of their leaders using terms such as "respect," "understanding," and "acknowledgment" of the position in which their leaders were placed during the organizational change. In expressing their view of their leaders' role, they understood that, during the organizational change, their leaders' role was to implement the broader decision; their leaders' other role may have been some involvement with the process of decision making in regard to implementation. One follower gave this assessment:

> It was beyond [my mid-level leader's] scope of authority; I believe that this was going to happen. I mean, it was a decision made at a high level, so it was going to happen. I think [my mid-level leader's] reaction was kind of like, "We don't have a choice." I believe what was kind of the issue sometimes is there were so many decisions to be made, and some that I was supposed to [help] make things happen; [my mid-level leader] wasn't necessarily the decision maker on some of those things.

Others spoke of their leaders' roles from the nature of authority and responsibility when describing the role of their leadership. For example, one follower offered,

> I can say we probably were not told in the best ways that it was going to happen. We were not part of the discussion, and we were just told that it was going to happen this way. It's not necessarily good when you've dedicated yourself to one route. When it's done that way, I don't think it inevitably brings out every good trait in people.

Participant followers saw the challenges of their leaders as well as their own, but some saw their leaders as individuals who acted and actively participated in the implementation aspect of the merger. They expressed this in phrases such as the leaders "organized" and "worked at" and "questioned."

Followers' impressions of the roles of their leaders were based on how they perceived their relationship as well as how they described themselves as followers. The other influencing factor on their perception of their leaders' role was how the organizational change affected their organizational life. For some, it was additional work; for others, it was the loss of indirect influence, and for others, it was the loss of their jobs.

How Has a Leader's Role in Leading Organizational Change Altered the Leader-Follower Working Relationship?

The fourth question was about how leading organizational change modified the perceived relationships between leaders and followers. This question sought to illuminate if a leader's role related to leading organizational change and the associated shifts in organizational life would alter the ways leaders and followers viewed their relationships. When describing their relationship with their followers, various leaders reflected that they felt their relationships with their followers were not altered or strengthened despite their roles leading organizational change. One leader said, "I think, if anything, [the organizational change] just brought us all closer. It's not as extreme as a traumatic experience, but it's something we all relate to together." Another leader spoke of how the qualities of his existing relationship, described using phrases such as "sense of trust and understanding" and "the level of candor," are the reasons for the lack of alterations to his leader-follower relationships.

Leaders spoke of the how they involved their followers in decisions and discussions taking place during the change. They talked about how they trusted their followers and had an open dialogue so that all were aware of what was occurring during the organizational change. Barbara noted,

> The folks that I was leading, they understood that there was disorganization, and that there was lack of communication. And so in the end, they had to be patient like I had to be patient, but they also wanted to get the job done, but they couldn't make some of the decisions and move forward until we got answers.

Similarly, one leader posited that his role in leading organizational change had not modified his working relationships with his followers. In this leader's opinion, it was because they already had established an excellent understanding of how they worked together. He expressed this opinion even while noting that some left because of the organizational change, but in his view, "All of them would come back in a relatively quick manner."

An alternative view was expressed by Franklin, who perceived his leadership during organizational change altered his relationship with his followers. Franklin described how he observed shared leadership affected his relationship with his followers: "So, they didn't see me as the leader anymore. There were other leaders who impacted my ability to lead at that point."

To reinforce his views of how the authority and responsibility themes discussed earlier affected his ability to lead his followers, Franklin described how he perceived his followers' expectations of his leadership role during organizational change altered their views of him as their leader:

> I think that they expected me to provide some level of stability to their jobs, and they wanted me to provide them some stability during the merger process. And I wasn't able to do that. And so, I think that had a subtle but real corrosive effect in terms of trust. I think it has; I think it undermined my authority.

This effect of stability leaders perceived their followers needed during change was also expressed by Barbara but from a different perspective. She defined her role concerning her relationship with her followers as "So for my staff, I am the safety net."

The followers' description of how their leaders' roles in leading organizational change modified their relationship was unique in that it was tied mostly to how strongly they perceived their relationship with their leader to be before the change. Most participant followers views of their leader had been altered in one of three ways: strengthened, cemented, or modified toward being more cautious, and each view mimicked their leaders' reactions during the change.

The group of individuals who felt that their leaders' roles in leading change strengthened their relationship described their leader using terms such as "respect," "understanding," and "admiration." These individuals already had established positive and healthy relationships with their leader before the change. Some participant followers described a growth in their admiration for their leader, specifically with how they perceived their leader dealt with situations associated with being a leader during organizational change. Nancy represented this category of follower:

> If anything, it probably made our relationship stronger. It didn't make it worse. I've known [my leader] for so long, it's just kind of another one of those bumps in the road that we've persevered together. [chuckle] I admire all that she's been

> through. I think it maybe changes my view even for the better of when I see what she has done.

Another echoed these comments but used slightly different terms in describing how the change altered her relationship with her leader:

> I've always had the utmost respect for him [Franklin]. If anything, it's made me respect him more as an individual because watching him go through some … when he has had to be pretty tough to be able to be representative of the organization you're coming from, yet still be able to interact. I think watching him has made me want to be more like him as a leader.

Conversely, other followers explained that their relationships with leaders did change because of the organizational change. The shift appeared to be influenced heavily by the authority and responsibility theme, as one follower illustrated:

> I would probably go as far to say, is some days, my direct supervisor might have not really known which way it was going, because I think there was a lot of changing of thoughts, directions, concepts, even after it was just said, "Okay, we're going to do this merger."

One follower explained how she has more respect for the formal authority her leader has within her position. The follower provided the following example to describe how the dynamic of their relationship changed:

> Well, I do. I do. Because I think I saw more of those… I've seen her in a high stress situations before. I saw her during the [organizational] change. But I think that during this one, I saw more of those political undertones, and I really gained a greater respect for her in a lot of sense. I think I respect her more.

The follower did lament that her relationship with her leader has been altered. While she has always respected her authority, she was not as likely to challenge her leadership as much as she may have before her role of leading organizational change. Henry, another follower, expressed it like so:

> After going through that, so our relationship has changed a little bit. I guess that goes back to me saying, I give my opinion then I back off and say, "Okay, you're the boss." You're going to do it, and I'll do what you say, even I don't like it.

Some followers described the alterations in their relationship with their leader from a critical viewpoint. These followers used phrases such as "loss of trust," "did not care," "tearing everything we have built," or "lack of voice" in their descriptions of their leaders. Some discussed how their leaders' roles in leading organizational change validated their views on their leaders. One described it the following way:

> I've felt for, ever since this person was my leader, that I didn't have a lot of respect for her in that position. And I still feel that way. I don't think that I really learned anything new about her because of this.

Similarly, one follower stated that his thoughts on his leader were validated because of his leader's view during the organizational change, saying that he did not learn anything "from this experience that I hadn't already learned. So I don't feel like... No, I really don't think it's changed a whole lot about how I feel about my leader."

Another follower believed that her leader did not value her views or opinions or have a good relationship with her as a follower and divulged that she never developed any rapport with her leader. Here is how she described their relationship:

> I don't think it was a very good relationship. I don't think at that point in time that that person was used to working with me. I guess it sometimes felt that we didn't get the attention and the concern that I thought it was at, that they took it as. If that makes sense. I thought it was a higher priority than they did.

Epilogue

In this chapter, I provided insights into how organizational change was lived by leaders and their followers. I used their words to express their lived experiences to help the reader understand how leading and following during organizational change affects individuals' perceptions of themselves, their roles, and their relationships. Using a phenomenological approach allowed for fuller description and understanding of how these experiences were lived by the participants of this study. I used the words of participant leaders and followers to help answer the four-primary research questions and provide a sense of how this merger affected them in their organizational life.

In the next chapter, I describe how these individuals' expressions of their lived experiences spawned four concepts and ideas for future research and understanding. I also provide a road map for both practitioners and other researchers to use to discover new insights into what happens during organizational change and into the manifestations of leadership, followership, leader-follower dynamics, and team work.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background and Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of leaders and their followers during organizational change, in this case a merger between two universities. The intention was to gain an understanding via the lived experiences of the participants of how leaders and their followers were affected by the role of these leaders during organizational change. Findings could then provide insight for other leaders, administrators, and followers who may be involved in leadership during major organizational change.

This study addressed a growing need to understand how organizational change affects leaders (Burke, 2014; Ford & Ford, 2012). I sought to understand how and in what manner leaders and followers experience organizational change. Although researchers have suggested that leaders do not make it through the organizational change process unscathed (Ford & Ford, 2012), there is limited knowledge of how leaders experience organizational change and how organizational change affects the leaders themselves (Burke, 2014).

In a study of universities and hospitals, Denis et al. (2001) described leadership as being dynamic, collective, situated, and dialectic. Leading these types of organizations, and particularly leading organizational change, places both individual leaders and the leadership constellation under stress. Unfortunately, very little is known about how leaders, either individually or collectively, deal with this in practice. Their study provided insights into how the leadership of organizational change in universities and hospitals manifests itself and provided insights on how organizational change is complicated even further by the complexity of pluralistic organizations and shared leadership. It provided no insight on how a leader dealt with the strategic, political, and organizational relationships. It did not discuss the stress on leaders or followers during these changes, lacked an understanding of why and how this process evolved during change, and did not give insights into leaders' thinking in regard to the processes.

Second, this study contributes to the research on leader-follower relationship dynamics within the context of organizational change because it illuminates how organizational change modifies leaders, followers, and their relationships. In particular, this study provides other leaders with the ability to learn from the lived experience of both leaders and followers who have participated in organizational change. It increases understanding of leadership by examining it from multiple perspectives as a social and cultural phenomenon (Day, 2014). Using a multi-perspective approach is significant in adding to the research literature because it allows one to fully understand leadership from the context and from the perspective of both the leader and the follower (Day, 2014).

One of the goals of this study was to provide insight into how organizational change affects leaders (Burke, 2014), therefore providing a richer and deeper understanding of the roles and experiences of leaders and followers during an organizational change in a higher education setting. In turn, this study will aid other leadership researchers in understanding how an organizational change in higher education institutions affects leaders, followers, and their relationships.

Finally, this study elucidates what it means to be a mid-level leader of organizational change within the context of higher education, thus allowing other higher education administrators to learn and understand the organizational change from their lived experiences.

Phenomenological Analysis

This phenomenological study sought to understand how leaders and followers experience organizational change. I explored how leaders and their followers perceived their roles and how their relationships may have been altered because of the leaders' roles during a merger. The examination of these individuals during this time offers insights for researchers, academic executives, and practitioners of leadership in higher education into what occurs and into what is experienced by individuals during organizational change. The use of a qualitative research method during this study was important in gaining a set of rich descriptions of the lived experiences of leaders and their followers during organizational change. Participant selection occurred via the use of critical case (merging institutions), criterion sampling (leaders and followers who were part of organizational change), and a snowball sampling (to identify individuals). The sampling was based on the recommendations of a key informant, who yielded a total of 23 possible participants, of whom 17 agreed to participate. The 17 participants were five leaders and 12 followers who were involved in an organizational change merger. An inductive approach to data collection was used following an interview protocol in which semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions over an 11-month period. All data collection took place at two higher education institutions located in the southwestern United States. I met with participants who had very recently (within the prior year) gone through the organizational merger or were still in the process of merging.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis, with each interview provided to participants for feedback, elaboration, or correction. The interview protocol is in Appendices C and D of this study. Data coding of all the interviews followed Saldana's (2009) coding manual for qualitative research data and were organized and analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) five-step procedure for analyzing phenomenological data (Creswell, 2012; Klenke, 2008).

This research study was based on four overarching research questions/objectives.

1. How do mid-level leaders in higher education describe their experiences during organizational change?
2. How do leaders' self-perception of their leadership roles change based on their experiences during organizational change?
3. What are followers' perceptions of their leaders' role in organizational change?
4. How has a leader's role in leading organizational change altered the leader-follower working relationship?

The intent of this research was for the study findings to add to the body of knowledge on leadership, followership, organizational behavior, and organizational change. Using Moustakas' (1994) second step, the process of achieving horizontalization led to 585 unique statements, which were then reduced to four emergent themes. In the remainder of this chapter, I align literature and findings, provide insights for participants, and offer additional areas for future research based on findings about the lived experience of participants.

Summary of Findings

The first research question yielded how mid-level leaders described their experiences during organizational change. Participant leaders described their experiences of leading organizational change from various points of view through how they defined authority, responsibility, and their internal views of their roles within the organizational hierarchy. They also described how their internal views on distributed leadership and coordinated activities led to a sense of self-doubt in their abilities when it came to leading their units—and the organization as a whole—through organizational change.

Various leaders expressed frustrations with leading and discussed how they internalized their roles and responsibilities when leading organizational change in complex organizations. These experiences with sharing leadership, decision making, and reliance on others to work with them were expressed in how participant leaders answered the second research question, which was, "How do leaders' self-perception of their leadership role change based on their experiences during an organizational change?" The findings suggest that leaders are in some way changed because of the roles they play during organizational change. Participants spoke about the following themes: shared leadership, the perception of authority and responsibility, and how leading organizational change had modified their views of both themselves and their roles within the organization.

While some leaders looked to their prior experience as a guide when leading the organizational change, those prior experiences were irrelevant and insufficient, which required some of the leaders to re-examine what their roles within the organizational authority structure were during the change. One of these roles embraced the idea that they are both leaders and followers. This means that within a complex organizational environment, participant leaders are required to be adaptable to sharing leadership responsibilities with others within the organization. These include authority in decision making and shared control with their units and the whole organization. This was highlighted because of the interdependence with how some decisions affected both individual units and the whole organization because of the merger.

The way mid-level leaders express their authority and how it is derived is similar to the conceptual view of authority presented by Yukl and Falbe (1991). Yukl and Falve described authority as “the way individuals defined their perceptions about the rights, duties, and responsibilities associated with their leader’s position within an organization or social system” (p. 422).

The modification in the organizational structures required by the organizational change forced participants to reflect and examine how and in what ways mid-level leaders derived authority. The merger caused participant leaders to change their view on formal authority and responsibility. Participant leaders used phrases such as “I was placed,” “I was given responsibility,” and “I have a duty” in describing their role in the organization. Their involvement in the merger of two universities made them more aware of their authority and responsibility within the organization as well as their role in organizational change. When confronted by their perceptions and concerns regarding reasons for the change, they faced the fact that these concerns were irrelevant because these were based on their perceptions of responsibility and authority within the organization before the merger. Leaders then found that their views of their role were not in alignment with what was required of them during the organizational change.

An individual's self-perception of themselves as a leader when it comes to how he or she understands their authority and responsibility is what leadership scholars describe as leadership identity theory. Day et al. (2009) defined leadership self-identity as the way a leader thinks of himself or herself based on experiences, knowledge, values, and self-perceptions. Leadership and identity research has historically acknowledged that identities develop over time (social identity theory), yet theorizes that a leader's self-identity, once internalized, becomes a stable and perpetual feature of the person (DeRue et al., 2009; Komives et al., 2005). In this study, leaders spoke of how the organizational modifications and the leadership of the merger required them to rethink or re-conceptualize their leadership identity, thereby supporting the idea of social identity.

While some participants looked at their involvement with prior organizational change experiences to help them make sense of the current change, they were confronted with the fact that this organizational change was different because they did not have the same authority and responsibility. This disconnect expressed by participant leaders between their understanding and perceptions of their level of authority is like what

Ainley and Bailey (1997) described in their study of organizational change in higher education, where individuals in the mid-level of an organizational hierarchy expressed "ambivalence and ambiguity regarding their authority during an organizational change" (p. 58).

The third question in this study provided insight into how followers perceive their leader and leader's role during organizational change. The way followers perceived their leaders was influenced by their follower type, which is based on Kelley's (1998) typology, where followers' views were interpreted based on the existing relationship (before the merger) with their leaders.

Leaders struggled with their role identity, shared leadership, and authority associated with leading during organizational change. Leaders' outward expressions and behaviors related to them dealing with modification of their leadership self-identity due to the organizational change. Followers' perceptions of what a leader was going through as it was occurring were quite different.

An alienated follower perceived this struggle as a lack of leadership and as a leader not being totally honest with what was occurring, whereas an exemplary follower's perception was more understanding of the dilemma his or her leader had with the associated stress and conflict because of the organizational change, and an exemplary follower would offer to help his or her leader during this time (Kelley, 1998).

Similarly, there was an indication that followers took cues from their leaders during the change. Participant followers described how they would attempt to interpret a leader's actions or activities as cues to what was occurring. In this case, participant followers who understood why their leaders seemed to be indecisive moved from what would be considered exemplary followers to pragmatic survivors because of their understanding of their leaders' roles during the change.

This misalignment of perceptions based on follower type is evident in how individuals described a leader's actions during organizational change. Leaders described their frustration with distributed leadership and the associated authority because of the overall lack of clarity regarding their ability to make decisions. Followers based on type would express phrases such as "it was out of his control" and "the leader would change their mind," as well as phrases like "gaining respect." These phrases, used by followers, described what they perceived as a leader's cognitive dissonance with the ambiguity of leadership during the change and demonstrated that they may not understand the nuances required by mid-level leaders during the change and are relying on their understanding of what it means to be a leader based on their prior working relationship.

This also helps explain why followers' perceptions of a leader's intentions during organizational change may be completely different than what is intended. The discrepancy between leader action and follower interpretation is what participants describe via their lived experiences as the theme of ambiguity of leadership during organizational change.

The fourth question in this study sought to understand if a leader's role during organizational change altered the leader-follower working relationship. The findings suggest that the leader-follower relationship dynamic is affected by a leader's role during organizational change. The extent to which the relationship is altered is based on how followers described their relationship, which was diagnosed using Kelley's followership typology, before the organizational change. Exemplary followers, for example, shifted toward a more pragmatic survivor follower type during the organizational change. This can be partially explained by what followers described as their level of uncertainty and how they interpreted the way in which the organizational change was unfolding. These followers used words like, "I can see what my leader is going through" and "I understand what they have to deal with" in their depictions of their leader's role during the organizational change. These phrases indicate that followers looked for cues based on their leaders' behaviors and actions during organizational change. In this case, exemplary participant followers who understood why their leaders seemed to be indecisive shifted to pragmatic survivors because of elevated levels of uncertainty surrounding what they understood the role of their leader to be during organizational change (Kelley, 1998).

Conversely, alienated followers described their relationship with phrases such as "I never had a relationship with my leader" and "it is a business-like relationship." According to an alienated follower, the stress and uncertainties expressed by mid-level leaders about their role during organizational change was a way to underscore the lack of trust between them and their leader. According to Kelley (1998), "Followers become alienated when they have unmet expectations, or they have lost trust in their leader" (p. 103).

This dynamic interpreting the actions and behaviors' approach to organizational change of leaders by followers either shifted already strong relationships or only served to reinforce relationships that had existed before the organizational change. This fact suggests that this kind of leader-follower relationship remains relatively stable even through the instability and uncertainty of organizational change. These findings support prior research by Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Ilies (2009), which stated that leader-follower relationships that are established early in the relationship remain stable over time.

Importantly, leaders sense their followers' tension and stress. Some leaders spoke of the responsibility and their efforts to manage the amount of change required to reduce the impact of organizational change on their followers, while others spoke about how they were unable to protect followers or create a sense of safety.

Conclusions

This study examined the lived experience of leaders and followers during organizational change and provided insights into the dynamics of leadership and followership during organizational change. The study findings highlight that organizational change affects individuals, their perceptions of themselves, and their relationships within the organization.

Perceptions of individuals' actions, events, and behaviors can cause levels of misunderstanding by both leaders and followers. The study also highlights that there is an existence of both the in-group and out-group focus of individuals within the organization and within individual units. These pre-existing groupings and relationships between leaders and followers, while not completely modified, in fact shift; these shifts are based on the perceptual strength of the leader-follower relationship.

Also, mid-level leaders are impacted by the forces within the hierarchal structures, including executive leadership directives from the top, follower expectations from below, and the distribution of authority, power, and responsibility that they must manage during change (Kah & Parry, 2004). This tension of leaders during change can be viewed as causing leaders to cope with their leadership identity and leader self-efficacy during organizational change. This may be viewed as indecisiveness from followers with pre-existing trust issues with their leaders.

Also, all mid-level leaders and followers try to make sense of the world—in this case their organizational life—which is called sensemaking (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Weick, 1995). Due to the complexity and chaotic nature of organizational change in the moment, people strive to interpret and form an understanding of what is occurring.

These findings indicate that organizational change, which is imposed on the leaders, can cause the leaders to re-evaluate their leadership identities and leadership self-efficacy. It also causes followers to review and evaluate their relationship with their leaders based on their interpretations of the shifts in authority, responsibility, and modification of organizational structures.

Finally, there is a sense that during these times, leaders and followers try to cope with organizational change by forming informal communication channels to make sense of what is occurring, to gain insights on decision process, and to create a sense of control of the organizational change.

Recommendations for Future Research

There has been limited research conducted on mid-level leaders, their experiences, and their roles during organizational change (Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Huy, 2002; McKinley & Scherer, 2000). Therefore, in higher education, there is an opportunity for research on organizational change. Research is even more limited regarding how mid-level leaders experience a vertical merger in higher education, which also provides various opportunities for future research.

This study's findings suggest participant mid-level leaders question their leadership identities based on organizational change as it relates to the amount of authority and responsibility they had during the organizational change. Additional research during organizational change could uncover the factors that could call into question the static nature or permanence of leadership identity. Study participants indicated that when an organization is going through significant organizational change, conflicts arise that uncover modifications to leadership identities, specifically in regard to leadership and leader-follower relationships.

The study findings also suggest participant mid-level leaders and followers engage in what are deemed to be grapevine networks to gather and disseminate information about the organizational change (Crampton et al., 1998). For example, a participant, Francis, mentioned that she engaged in informal communications (grapevine network) to get a sense of how the organizational change was unfolding and gain an understanding of what others understood was the tactical direction:

> So then, we're sitting there comparing, and we're not even on the same page, and it wasn't like me and this other leader were confrontational with each other.

> We're just comparing notes to like, "Here's all this information that's supposed to be flowing down, but you've got this piece of information, I got this, and they contradict."

An additional avenue for further research is examining if these informal communication networks are maintained or mature differently during the organizational change. Additionally, do these grapevine networks support or hinder organizational change leadership? Future research could examine if a different follower typology provides additional insights into how organizational changes modify leadership-follower relationships.

Finally, various participant leaders described how they would often switch roles during organizational change. This is similar to the theorized concept of leader-follower switching (LFS), where individuals dynamically switch between leader and follower roles independent of their roles within the organization (Sy & McCoy, 2014). Future research could also explore how a mid-level leader who is both a leader and follower manages LFS during organizational change (Sy & McCoy, 2014).

Recommendations for Practice

While various authors have stated that communication is key to organizational change, the type and timeliness of communication are essential (Allen, Jimmieson, Bordia, & Irmer, 2007; Kotter, 1996). Some leaders felt that it was an issue for them to reconcile the overall vision with the implications of operational issues. Mostly, these mid-level leaders were concerned with how and what to do more than why. Both followers and leaders reflected this sense of disconnection.

Second, many leaders and followers were concerned about their position and how this change affected them directly. They began sensemaking and using the grapevine network to understand and, in some respects, cope with their perceptions of the modification of their organizational life. It highlights that in the absences of timely and direct discussions, these types of activities will flourish. It would be wise for executive leadership to work on the concept of sensegiving, "where leaders engage in the process of influencing how their followers are interpreting the world around them" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442)—specifically, in this case, an organizational merger. Providing individuals with not just a vision but mechanisms where individual leaders, both executive and mid-level, can provide a sense of what is occurring and why is critical to success.

Third, the issue of trust between leaders and followers is critical to the success of organizational change. The issue about information being kept and not shared is important. It would be prudent for mid-level leaders to understand that they have different relationships with individuals—what some leadership theorists call "in and out groups." These differing relationships tend to be highlighted during organizational change, especially when some tend to have more information about what their leader is thinking and others feel left out. This sense of organizational justice and role clarity would be beneficial for all employees involved in an organizational change. Since organizational change does not affect all areas equally, it is important to provide sufficient information to give individuals a reason as to why this may be occurring. This is critical because—as mentioned by some participants in this study—individuals during organizational change look at how others are being affected by the organizational changes. They examine and make judgments about what they view throughout the organization to aid them in making sense of the chaotic nature of what is considered change. Finally, it would be good for mid-level leaders to provide a sense of closure associated with the organizational change. Various participants, both mid-level leaders and followers, referenced the after-effects of the organizational change even a year-and-a-half after the technical completion of their part of the merger.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

On the Phone:

"Hello, my name is Juan E. Garza and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Texas A&M University. I am conducting a research study about Leadership of Organizational Change I am calling to ask if you would be willing to let me interview you. Participation should take about 90 minutes of your time 60 to complete the interview and 30 to review of transcribed data.

If you would be interested in participating in this interview, we can set up a time now or you can let me know when a good time would be to schedule it."

If interested, investigator will set up date and time and will provide subject with investigator contact information. "I have you scheduled for an interview on _____. If you have questions, I can be reached at 979-450-4211 or jegarza@email.tamu.edu Thank you for your help."

If not interested, investigator will end the call: "Thank you for your time."

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings.

My name is Juan E. Garza and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Texas A&M University. I am conducting a research study about Leadership of Organizational Change. I am emailing to ask if you would like to discuss your participation in the study. Participation should take about 90 minutes of your time 60 to complete the interview and 30 to review of transcribed data. Participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be confidential.

If you are interested, please reply to this email, I will contact you about scheduling time for an interview. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (jegarza@email.tamu.edu) or Dr. Jennifer Strong (Dr.Jen@tamu.edu).

Thank you for your time.

Juan E. Garza
Doctoral Candidate
Texas A&M University

IRB NUMBER: IRB2016-0075D
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 02/10/2016
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 02/01/2017

APPENDIX C

Leader and views of Change Interviews

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my note-taking, and to ease my ability to transcribe our conversation, I would like to audio record our conversation today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes as well as they transcribed text which will be eventually destroyed.

Also, please sign a consent form required in order to participate in this study. The form is devised to meet our human subject requirements per University Rules. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) research does not intend to inflict any harm.

Thank you for your agreeing to participate. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover.

1. How long have you worked with your current organization?
2. What have you experienced in terms of leading organizational change?
3. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of leading organizational change?
4. Specifically, what was your role in leading organizational change in the merger of HSC and Texas A&M?
5. How would you describe your experience in leading organizational change?
6. How would you describe your working relationship with your followers/subordinates?
7. Do you believe the experience of leading organizational change has modified your view of yourself and how you lead?
8. Prior to the change, what was your view and perception of yourself as a leader/manager?
9. Has this in any way changed because of the process you have gone through?
10. Can you provide me names of 3 of your subordinates you who were part of the organizational change?
11. Do you believe the change effected your view(s) of your employees/subordinates?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss as it relates to the merger with the other organization?

APPENDIX D

Follower and views of leader of organizational change Interviews

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my note-taking, and to ease my ability to transcribe our conversation, I would like to audio record our conversation today. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes as well as they transcribed text which will be eventually destroyed.

Also, please sign a consent form required in order to participate in this study. The form is devised to meet our human subject requirements per University Rules. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) research does not intend to inflict any harm.

Thank you for agreeing to participate.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover.

1. How long have you worked with you current organization?
2. How long have you worked with your leader?
3. How would you describe your working relationship with your leader/manager?
4. How would you describe yourself as an employee?
    a. As a maverick - think for yourself
    b. Keep things in perspective
    c. Minimize conflict
    d. Let those who get paid for it to deal with the headaches
    e. One who understands the goals of the organization and finds out how they add value
5. How would describe your experience with the merger with HSC/TAMU?
6. Do you believe that his experience changed your view of yourself as an employee?
    a. If so, how? Why?
7. Do you believe the experience effected your view(s) of your supervisor?
    a. If so, how? Why?
8. Is there anything else you'd like to discuss as it relates to the merger with the other organization?

IRB NUMBER: IRB2016-0075D
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 02/10/2016
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 02/01/2017

APPENDIX E

________ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to. The things that you will be doing are no more/greater than risks that you would come across in everyday life. Another risk include breach of privacy or confidentiality of your interview. The researchers have reduced this risk by using pseudo names for all participants, as well storing all information on encrypted media in a secure location.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?
You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?
The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only accessible to Mr. Juan E. Garza and Dr. Jennifer R. Strong, faculty chair who will have access to the records. Information about you will be stored in locked file cabinet; computer files protected via encryption key and with password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and protocol director. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?
You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jennifer Strong, Ph.D. to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-862-1423 or dr.jen@tamu.edu.

You may also contact the Protocol Director, Juan E. Garza at 979-450-4211 or jegarza@email.tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or

APPENDIX F